

# The Sacred Town *of* Sankhu

*The Anthropology of Newar  
Ritual, Religion and  
Society in Nepal*

Bal Gopal Shrestha



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Religion and Society in Nepal

By

Bal Gopal Shrestha

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P U B L I S H I N G

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This book first published 2012

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

12 Back Chapman Street, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2XX, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data  
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

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ISBN (10): 1-4438-3770-9, ISBN (13): 978-1-4438-3770-5

To my parents,  
Krishna Maya Karmācārya and Purna Bhakta Ghorī Shrestha



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## FOREWORD

Bal Gopal Shrestha's book, *The Sacred Town of Sankhu*, covers the whole history and culture of Sankhu with an encyclopaedic thoroughness, detail, and depth of knowledge as perhaps only a local anthropologist, embedded in Sankhu's various networks, could aspire to. It bears comparison with Robert Levy's great work, *Mesocosm: Hinduism and the Organization of a Traditional Hindu City in Nepal* (1990, University of California Press), on the city of Bhaktapur. However, Levy, working in a large city by Nepali standards, could hardly expect to achieve the same density of coverage as Shrestha in a much smaller town.

Sankhu is one of the oldest sites in the Kathmandu Valley. Inscriptions show that there was a Mahāsāṅghika Buddhist monastery there in the Licchavī period (4<sup>th</sup>-9<sup>th</sup> centuries); there is still a rock-cut monastic cell on the way to the Vajrayoginī temple, popular with religious visitors and picnickers, similar to those found in the famous Buddhist sites of western India. Thanks to the centrality of the goddess Vajrayoginī in the imagination and collective ritual life of Sankhu's inhabitants, Buddhist associations remain strong to this day, despite the gradual Hinduization of the town, especially in the last two centuries or so. In his three-volume classic history of Nepal (*Le Népal*, 1905 1: 29), Sylvain Lévi famously wrote that Nepal (i.e. the Kathmandu Valley), with its combination of Hinduism and Buddhism, and its many archaic features (such as the worship of the god Indra), was 'India in the making' (*le Népal, c'est l'Inde qui se fait*). In the same way one could say that Sankhu is the Kathmandu Valley in the making.

This is true in yet another sense: Sankhu is the home of the famous Svasthānī cult. It is here that people come to hear the story of the goddess Svasthānī every year and many women participate in a month-long fast in the hope of obtaining a good husband and a happy family life. It is from Sankhu that the fasting practice (*vrata*) has spread out, not just to other Newar settlements, but – translated into Nepali – to the whole of the Nepali-speaking world. Today this includes Nepalis settled in the USA, UK, and Far East.

The astonishing architecture and cityscapes of the Newars, now under unprecedented pressure from massive in-migration and unchecked modern developments, go back to models worked out in first millennium South

Asia. The old city centres of Kathmandu, Lalitpur (Patan), and Bhaktapur have long been UNESCO-designated World Heritage sites. Sankhu is part of this same civilization and culture. Bal Gopal Shrestha's volume will therefore be indispensable reading for future scholars of the Kathmandu Valley.

David N. Gellner  
Oxford

## PREFACE

I was born to a religious Newar family in which the religious traditions described in this monograph were part of daily life for every member of my family. I remember that, during my childhood, the worship (*pūjā*) of different deity images at my home and in our neighbourhood was part of my family's daily routine. Such worship (*pūjā*) varies, depending upon the occasion. Among the Hindus, a service of worship in five steps (*pañcopacāra pūjā*) or in sixteen steps (*ṣoḍaśopacāra-pūjā*) is common, but lay people do not follow such rules strictly (Tachikawa 1983:104–86). Traditional Newar households are organised as joint families, and ours was no exception. I spent my childhood sitting on the lap of my grandmother, who was the oldest woman in the house and who had to take care of the children at home. I never saw my grandfather because he passed away long before I was born. As the oldest person in the house, my grandmother was free from all household duties, so as a pastime she played with the children. Every evening we used to turn the big living room in our house into a sleeping room for children to sleep together in. Children liked to sleep as close as possible to our grandmother, because she used to tell folk stories until they all fell asleep. She had many stories to tell, about ghosts, witches, gods and goddesses, animals, and good and bad people. She was our beloved grandmother.

She used to get up very early in the morning, usually before dawn, to ritually wash her face. She also took her grandchildren to the neighbourhood centre for ritual cleansing. I remember that she carried me many times, to ritually wash my face. I must have been less than three years old. Washing our faces was the first ritual we learned in our childhood.

After washing my face, she used to carry me into the temple of Gaṇeśa, the god of health, wisdom and prosperity, situated in the centre of our neighbourhood. She taught us how to bow before the stone statue of Gaṇeśa or other images in the temple in a gesture of worship. She also taught us to put a red and yellow mark (*tikā*) on our foreheads and to put flowers on our heads as blessings from those statues. She knew by heart some hymns (*ślokas*) that praise Gaṇeśa and other deities, and used to recite them. We were taught to walk clockwise around the temple. Taking a ride on her back, I used to ring a bell hung on the temple wall. Standing at the back of the temple, she used to pray to Vajrayoginī (Hyāumkhvāḥ māju

or the red-faced mother) facing north, because her temple could be seen from there.

A few years before her death, my grandmother was unable to go outside our home, because she lost her eyesight as a result of cataracts. Her eyes were not operated on, but a local traditional doctor put certain herbal medicines on them, though to no avail. I was about six years old when she passed away. By then, her grandchildren had learned the duties of washing their faces and worshipping gods and goddesses every morning.

Slowly, we also learned how to bow to parents and elders, offer food to gods before taking our meal, use the right hand and not to touch others while eating our meals, and wash hands and rinse our mouth after a meal. In this way, from our early childhood onwards, we learned to practise many customs and manners in our day-to-day life.

I learned to climb up to the hill of Vajrayoginī with my father, who used to go to the temple every morning to worship that goddess. Every day, he also participated in singing devotional songs (*bhajan*) in the temple sanctuary. On several occasions, I followed him when he went to sing devotional songs at other *bhajan* places in the town. When I was about eight years old, I learned to climb the Vajrayoginī hill by myself to worship gods and goddesses at the sanctuary. I used to carry some grains of rice in a small tin container to offer to the deities and also to feed the monkeys. The main gate of the Vajrayoginī temple used to be crowded with devotees in the early morning, who came to offer worship and to receive flowers, holy water, red and yellow powders (*tikā*), and black soot (*mohanī*) as blessings. As a small child, I had to push myself through the crowd to have a glance at the goddess Vajrayoginī and to receive her blessings from the priest. Except for the Buddhist priests on duty, nobody is allowed to enter the temple or to touch the idols of the goddesses. As a mediator between the goddess and the people, the priest on duty can distribute blessings but he cannot touch the worshippers. People worship the goddess by throwing grains of rice over the images. In the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, where processional statues are kept, people are free to enter. On the first floor of this temple, we used to grind a sandalwood paste (*candan*) on a stone to take its dust as *tikā*. We also used to apply ashes on our foreheads from the eternal fire kept on the same floor. I had to carry some *tikā* and flowers later, for distributing to other members of my family and sometimes to bystanders as blessings of Vajrayoginī. On the way back home from the temple, it was customary to greet bystanders by saying “*tāre mām*” (save us mother).



Besides these daily practices, we learned more about our ritual traditions during annual calendrical festivals, feasts, fasts and processions of deities in the town (Chapter 10). We learned to follow these rituals and traditions without knowing anything about their meanings. The ritual traditions became deeply embedded in our minds. This is how a Newar learns the religious traditions of his society from early childhood.

However, as soon as I began to attend school and study modern geography, history, sciences and biology, all these religious and ritual beliefs were challenged. Most of the religious ideas that I had learned and practised at my home and in my local society faded away soon after I finished high school. Gradually, I began to avoid religious ritual practices and to disbelieve their purposes. Later, during my university days and as a journalist, I could no longer appreciate Newar culture and religion. It was many years later, when I was engaged in doing research with Bert van den Hoek, that I began to investigate Newar religious practices, and this eventually led me to carry out research on the town of Sankhu and its society, the place where I was born and grew up.

From a modern anthropological point of view, I am an “insider” to Sankhu, because I was born in the town and spent my childhood and youth there. To be a local researcher was, on the one hand, an advantage, but it also had its difficulties. Before I started the research, I was overconfident about carrying it out. However, as soon as I began my research, I started to realise my weaknesses. As a local researcher, the most obvious difficulty for me was to see things objectively. Slowly I began seeing things from distance and to acquire a more balanced view of the town. This proved challenging.

My insider identity privileged me in many ways. I knew the town; I was acquainted with its people, customs, manners, feasts, festivals, rituals and traditions. I am a native speaker of Newar, the language spoken in Sankhu. It was easy for me to obtain the data I needed. Usually, people were helpful and provided me with any information they could give. However, I also had difficulties in gaining access to certain rituals, especially the rituals categorised as “secret.” For instance, on one occasion I was permitted to witness the fire sacrifice performed eight days before the procession of Vajrayoginī; but on another occasion, I was refused access. Similarly, one time I was allowed to see the fire sacrifice performed at the Dhalampu *sataḥ* on the last day of the Mādhava Nārāyaṇa festival; on another occasion, I was forbidden to do so. In this respect it became clear to me that some rituals were not actually secret in themselves, but that it was their particular practitioners who decided whether or not they were to be secret.

In spite of being a local person, my identity seemed to change as soon as I started my research. Sometimes, when I had to witness certain rituals or needed to have something explained, I was ridiculed because people did not treat me as an “outsider.” To what extent I managed the shift in identity from local insider to researcher is left to the reader to judge. However, my being a part of the Sankhu community remained important throughout my research, as is reflected in this book.

There are many historical and culturally important monuments in Sankhu. In the past, socio-religious associations (*guthi*) were responsible for maintaining them; but nowadays such associations do not function, because of the financial constraints. So, for several decades, numerous cultural and religious monuments have remained in a dilapidated condition in Sankhu, including the Mahādev temple and surrounding monuments, the Vajrayoginī temple and the Dhomlā Mahādev temple.

An innovative aspect of this research was that I was able to contribute to the preservation of these monuments. As part of my research budget, I obtained some money from the Leiden Research School CNWS to contribute to the restoration of the Vajrayoginī temple and the Mādhava Nārāyaṇa god house (*dyochem*). In the case of the restoration of the temple of Vajrayoginī, the small contribution I made enabled the Friends of Sankhu, a local NGO, to carry out an initial survey of the temple that eventually enabled them to obtain a larger amount of money from the Netherlands Development Assistance (NEDA) to accomplish a major restoration in 1998–2000. The Friends of Sankhu also received financial support from the board of the Vereniging Nederland Nepal in The Netherlands for this purpose. Similarly, during the time I was carrying out my research, I was able to keep in touch with the Friends of Sankhu in raising funds for the restoration of the Mahādev temple (1996–7) and the surrounding monuments in the Sālkha quarter, and for the restoration of Sarāvata Sataḥ and Datta or Lāyku Phalcā, both traditional rest houses or shelters in the Imḷā quarter, in 2001–2. SNV Nepal and Vereniging Nederland Nepal gave financial assistance towards the first and second phases of the restoration of the Mahādev temple and the surrounding monuments, while, Cordaid and Vereniging Nederland Nepal assisted the restoration of the Sarāvata Sataḥ, and, similarly, Wilde Ganzen, the Netherlands, provided funds to restore the Lāyku Phalcā. My involvement in these restorations played a very positive role in obtaining the best possible support from the people of Sankhu during my research.

I was also allowed to film the Vajrayoginī and Mādhava Nārāyaṇa festivals for the first time. The audiovisual recording of rituals was an important method in the overall research, especially for describing the

rituals. I also succeeded in recording several other rituals. These will be edited and, in due course, may prove a valuable by-product of the research in their own right.

I spent six years producing this book. During this period I was associated with the Research School CNWS, University of Leiden (September 1996 to August 2002) as a Ph.D. candidate (Assistent-in-Opleiding). Having followed courses and seminars provided for Ph.D. students, I drafted my research questions, and went on to spend a total of fifteen months in Nepal doing fieldwork during my Ph.D. research. I began my first period of fieldwork in Sankhu, which lasted nine months, in April 1997; my second period was January–March 2000; my third was May–July 2000. On this last occasion, my stay was more personal, as I went to see my ill mother and to attend to her funeral rites afterwards. After this, I returned to Leiden to finish writing this monograph and to defend it at the University of Leiden, the Netherlands, as my Ph.D. dissertation in September 2002. After my graduation I have been able to revisit my research field in Nepal on a number of occasions, and this has been invaluable in allowing me to update its data and to revise my manuscript for the present edition.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This monograph is a revised version of my Ph.D. dissertation, “The Ritual Composition of Sankhu: The Socio-Religious Anthropology of a Newar Town in Nepal”, which I presented at the University of Leiden in 2002. Thanks to the Cambridge Scholars Publishing, this book is in your hands. Especially, I like to mention Carol Koulikourdi and Amanda Millar for their patience, and Soucin Yip-Sou for designing the cover of the book.

I received immense support from many individuals and organisations in The Netherlands, Nepal and other countries during the time I was writing this monograph. Without their kind support and inspiration, I could never have accomplished this task. A list would become too long to include them all, but I would like to mention those persons whose support and cooperation have been of great value to me.

I am most grateful to my Leiden supervisor, Professor Dirk H.A. Kolff, for his guidance, compassion and patience, which led this project to a final success. I am extremely grateful to the Research School CNWS, University of Leiden, the Department of Languages and Cultures of Central and South Asia, the Faculty of Arts, University of Leiden, the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS), Leiden and the J. Gonda Foundation, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Amsterdam, for providing me financial support to carry out the research for my dissertation. I express my sincere gratitude to the staff of the School for the support and kindness extended to me, especially to Professor Jarich G. Oosten, the former Director of the CNWS, who was also the referee to my Ph.D. thesis, Dr Willem J. Vogelsang, executive secretary, and Ilona Beumer. I would like to thank the International Institute for Asian Studies (IIAS) for accommodating me from 1 September 2001 to 1 July 2002 as a Gonda fellow. The J. Gonda Foundation, Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, awarded me a J. Gonda Foundation Fellowship. I am indebted to Professor W.A.L. Stokhof, former Director of the IIAS, and its staff members, especially Dr Josine Stremmelaar, for their warm cooperation.

I am grateful to Professor K.R. van Kooij for his invaluable guidance at the early stage of this research. I express my gratitude to all the members of my Ph.D. committee: Professors, H.W. Bodewiz, K.R. van Kooij, B.C.A. Walraven, University of Leiden, J.C. Galay, Directeur

d'Études, EHESS, Paris, David N. Gellner, University of Oxford and Dr Sjoerd Zanen, The Netherlands. Dr Zanen read earlier drafts of the chapters and provided extremely helpful comments. I am indebted to him also for allowing me to reproduce maps from his article (Zanen 1986) with the changes I needed for this book. My sincere gratitude goes to Frans Janssen, an Indologist of the University of Utrecht, who invested his valuable time in producing beautiful maps and gave helpful comments for this book.

I was fortunate to receive the unfailing support from two Leiden anthropologists, the late Bert van den Hoek and Han F. Vermeulen. Regrettably, before seeing this work, Bert passed away on 1 December 2001 in Mumbai, India, after a fatal accident on 27 November on his way to Pune to participate in a conference (Shrestha and Vermeulen 2001). I owe my gratitude to Dr Henk Blezer, Dr Dirk J. Nijland, Professors J.C. Heesterman, Jan E.M. Houben, Carla Risseuw and Tilman Vetter in Leiden, and Jos D.M. Platenkamp of Münster University, Germany, for their inspirations and support.

I would like to thank Peter van der Geest, Lennert Gesterkamp, Dr Ed van Hoven, Mrs Riejke Kamp, Erik de Maaker, Narender Mohkamsing, Nelleke Oosten, Dr Dhruba Pikha, Gerard J. Vermeulen and Loes van der Westrienen for their support and friendly gestures. My thanks go to friends, Martin Lammertsma and Dr Renske Doorenspleet, who remained of great support to my family and me in Leiden. For his support, I am grateful to Dr Radj Bhondoe, the Director of Seva Network Foundation, The Hague.

I would like to express my gratitude to the CNWS and Nederlandse Organisatie voor Wetenschappelijk Onderzoek NWO in The Hague for their funding for my field trips in Nepal, and a trip to the United Kingdom to carry out a study of some of the B.H. Hodgson collections at the British Library. The UK trip gave me the opportunity to discuss my subject with Professor Colin Rosser in Reading, England, the first anthropologist to carry out research in Sankhu in the mid 1950s, and with Professor David N. Gellner, an anthropologist at Oxford who is an authority on Newar culture and society. I would like to thank Professor Rosser for giving me some of the materials from his archive. Professor Gellner's writings on the Newars were a major source of inspiration for this book. I am very grateful to him for his helpful comments on many of the chapters here and writing foreword to this edition. I also have benefitted from Professor Gérard Toffin's numerous publications on the Newars. Thanks also to Dr Rhoderick Chalmers, UK, for his helpful comments. I would like to thank Shyam Krishna and Indra Lal Shrestha, who extended kind hospitality on

several occasions during my research visits to London.

I thank Dr Katherine N. Rankin, of the University of Toronto, Canada, for making helpful comments on several of my chapters. I express my gratitude to our friends in the USA, Season and Heather Shrestha in Baltimore, for their hospitality.

In Nepal, I benefited tremendously from many scholars and organisations. I am greatly indebted to my home institute, the Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies (CNAS), Tribhuvan University (TU) at Kirtipur, Kathmandu, Nepal, which granted generous study leave to accomplish this research project. I would like to thank all the staff members of the CNAS for their moral and practical support during this research. In particular, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to Professors Tirtha Prasad Mishra and Nirmal Man Tuladhar, former directors of CNAS for their constant support and encouragements. Similarly, I am indebted to Tribhuvan University Professors Panna Kaji Amatya, Dilli Ram Dahal, Prem Kumar Khatry, Tri Ratna Manandhar, Prayag Raj Sharma and Kashinath Tamot for their friendly encouragements. Similarly, I would like to thank Damini Vaidya of TU for her scholarly advices.

I am grateful to Professor Tej Ratna Kansakar, of Tribhuvan University, Gautam Manandhar, Kathmandu, Dr Nathan Porath, UK, Dr Stuart Robson of Melbourne, Australia, and Sean Kingston, UK for editing language in this book. I would like to express my gratitude to Professor Kamal Prakash Malla, a distinguished Nepalese scholar with whom I had the chance to discuss my research problems. He also read some of my chapters and gave valuable comments. I would also like to thank Pundit Gurusekhar Rajopadhyay, who transliterated, translated and deciphered Vedic *śloka*s from the *Aśvamedha yajña* text for me. I thank Hitkar Virsingh Kansakar, a prominent Nepal bhasa writer and teacher, for his encouragements and support for my research work. I am grateful to folklorist Keshar Lal Shrestha for his inspirations.

I am indebted to Tulsi Lal Singh of the Central Department of Nepal bhasa, Tribhuvan University, Patan, and Dr Bronwen Bledsoe of the Department of South Asian Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago, for providing me with their English translation of *Śānti Svasti Saphū* (SSS), a chronicle related to Sankhu Vajrayoginī. I would also like to thank Professor Raja Shakya, chief librarian, and Sarad Kansakar, of Āśā Archives, Kathmandu, as well as Mr Balaram Chitrakar of the National Archives, Kathmandu, for their kind help in copying several manuscripts.

I express my sincere gratitude to the people of Sankhu, without whose generous support I could never have accomplished this work. Especially, I

would like to mention Bishnubhakta Gorkhali, Bisweshwordas Shrestha, Roshan Bashi, Hariprasad Shrestha, Ranjan Shrestha and Saru Shrestha in Sankhu, who directly supported me. My thanks go to the Friends of Sankhu (FoS) and its members for their help in conducting a household survey in 1997. I have no words to thank my younger brother, Madan Gopal Shrestha, a demographer, who helped me in many ways during my fieldwork in Sankhu. I am also grateful to Yabalaksmi, Keshavlal, and my youngest brother Ramgopal for supplying information on some of the socio-religious associations (*guthis*) and funeral associations (*sī guthis*) in Sankhu while I was in Leiden.

It is my great pleasure to thank Sukrasagar Shrestha, a prominent archaeologist of Nepal at the Department of Archaeology, who together with other members of the FoS copied all the inscriptions from the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, Sankhu, and provided Devanāgarī transliterations for many of them. I am indebted to Saroj Man Amatya and Anil Makah Shrestha for the area maps of the Sālinadī and Vajrayoginī Sanctuary.

The late Surendra Rājopādhyāy and his family in Sankhu, who always took my questions generously, deserve my sincere gratitude. Similarly, I am indebted to the late priest, Panchalal Joṣī, and to Rajendra Panyāju Shrestha, the guardian of the Taleju temple in Sankhu. They provided me with invaluable information on their ritual performances. Many Vajrācārya Buddhist priests in Sankhu were very kind in supplying information on the Vajrayoginī rituals. In particular, I would like to thank Gyanmananda, Kanakmuni, the late Kriyananda, Puspa Vajra, the late Sakalananda, Sāhu, Siddhiharsha, Tejrāmuni and Yubaraj Vajrācārya. Gyanmananda and Kriyananda permitted me to copy some of the ritual texts and chronicles relating to Vajrayoginī and Vajrācāryas. I thank Govinda Prasad Dhaubaji Shrestha, former chairman of the Vajrayoginī Village Development Committee (VDC), for supplying me with a wealth of information. I am also grateful to Ratna Bahadur Shrestha, Thamel Kathmandu for his support.

During my fieldwork, I stayed in our parental home with my brothers and their families, who were living together as a joint family. All the members of my family were eager to see my book completed. Their moral support was invaluable, and I am grateful to my elder brothers, Harigopal and Laxman, and all other members of my family.

Finally, I would like to mention Sri Laksmi, my wife, and our children Amu, Aju and Nugah. They have shared all the emotions and hardships while I was writing this book. Sri collected and supplied the materials I needed from Kathmandu. In 1998, Sri and our children joined me in Leiden. Sri read and commented on all the chapters of this book. It is their

loving care and inspiration throughout this project that has led to its completion.

Although I have acknowledged many people and organisations for their help in accomplishing this work, none of them are responsible for any faults, mistakes or misinformation that remain in the book.

Before concluding my words, I remember my late parents, to whom this book is dedicated. My mother passed away on June 18, 2000, before seeing its completion. My father departed on January 4, 1980, long before its inception. They would have been happy to see the book. Their blessings, and those of many others, have helped me to complete it.

OXFORD, 2012 (NEPAL SAMVAT 1132)



## NOTE ON TRANSLITERATION

In this monograph I have tried to use as few native words as possible, but where unavoidable they are presented with their English equivalents. In most cases, I have put them between brackets immediately after their English equivalents. The glossary of native (Newar, Khas-Nepali and Sanskrit) words presented here may help readers to obtain a better understanding of the issues involved. In most cases, Khas-Nepali (Nep.) and Sanskrit (Skt.) words are indicated between brackets. In those cases that the Newars no longer perceive them as foreign words, they are treated as Newar words. Such loan words and Newar words are listed in full; variations are given between brackets. Diacritics are not used for personal names or names of popular places.

I have used Sanskritic tradition in applying diacritical symbol to Romanise Newar, Khas-Nepali and Sanskrit words. I have transcribed and transliterated the Devanāgarī scripts in the following manner:

a	ā			
i	ī			
u	ū			
ṛ				
e	ei			
o	au			
ṁ	ḥ			
k	kh	g	gh	ṅ
c	ch	j	jh	ñ
ṭ	ṭh	ḍ	ḍh	ṇ
t	th	d	dh	n
p	ph	b	bh	m
y	r	l	v	
ś	ṣ	s	h	

In Devanāgarī *ā* is pronounced as the *a* in *father*, *ī* as *ee* and *ū* as *oo*. Retroflex consonants are transcribed as *ṭ*, *ṭh*, *ḍ*, *ḍh* and *ṇ*. Similarly, *ṅ*, *ñ* and *ṁ* are used to represent nasal sounds. Differences between *b* and *v*, and *ś*, *ṣ* and *s* are also maintained.

## ABBREVIATIONS

BCE	Before the Common Era.
CBS	Central Bureau of Statistics
CNAS	Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies
CNS	Contributions to Nepalese Studies
CPN	Communist party of Nepal
DDC	District Development Committee
FoS	Friends of Sankhu
GC	Guthi Corporation
HHN	Household Number
HMG	His Majesty's Government
MG	Manuscript Gumbāhāḥ
MHP	Ministry of Housing and Physical Planning
MM	Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna
MMC	Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna Copy
MMC-1	Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna Copy 1
MPP I	Mādhava Nārāyaṇa Pratisthā Pūjā copy I
MPP II	Mādhava Nārāyaṇa Pratisthā Pūjā copy II
NKNP	<i>Nepālvarṣa Kriyā Nakhaḥcakhāḥ Pustakam</i>
NLPRC	National Languages Policy Recommendation Commission
NMK	Nepālbhāṣā Maṃkāḥ Khalah [ Association of the Newar Speakers]
NS	Nepāl Saṃvat
SLC	School Leaving Certificate
SV	Svasthānī Vrata Kathā
SVSS	<i>Sakvayā Vajrayoginī Jirṇoddāra Pratibedana</i> [Report of the Sankhu Vajrayoginī Renovation]
TU	Tribhuvan University
UML	United Marxist Leninist
VDC	Village Development Committee
VNN	Vereniging Nederland Nepal [Netherlands Nepal Association]
VS	Vikram Saṃvat



# CHAPTER ONE

## INTRODUCTION

### **The location**

Sankhu is an ancient town populated by the Newars, the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. This town, believed to have been a kingdom in the ancient past, is situated about twenty kilometers northeast of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. The foundation of the kingdom of Sankhu is attributed to the goddess Vajrayoginī, whose shrine is located in the forest above the town of Sankhu. The temple of Vajrayoginī is an important pilgrimage site for Buddhists and Hindus alike. The yearly festival of the goddess is also the main event in Sankhu's ritual cycle. According to the legend of Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna, Vajrayoginī instructed the priest, Jogdev, and the first king, Saṅkhadev, to build the town of Sankhu in the shape of a conch. The oldest inscription found in Sankhu is dated AD 538 (Śaka Saṃvat 460).

This monograph's major focus is on the rituals that shed light on the town's system of values. My study of Sankhu takes into account the complete festival cycle of the town and its connection with the network of ritual relations in the Kathmandu Valley at large, and records thirty-four of the festivals performed in the town.

During the procession of the statue of Vajrayoginī, a series of ritual activities involve the whole society without any barriers of caste (*jāt*). The month-long winter festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in the town also attracts pilgrims from all over the Kathmandu Valley and beyond, but it is prohibited for low castes to participate in it. In contrast with the festival of the goddess Vajrayoginī, it is a Brahmanic festival. At the same time, several religious activities take place in the town, and these correspond to nationally observed festivals, such as Dasāin, Tihār and others.

Once Sankhu was on an ancient trade route from Nepal to Tibet. Nowadays, its 5,430 inhabitants mainly make their living from agriculture, and from a variety of services in greater Kathmandu. Trade is still important, but less so since the loss of Sankhu's trade route to Tibet in the late 1950s.

The research on Sankhu's ritual composition deals with the relation between Hinduism and Buddhism, with the interrelationships between the town's twenty-two castes, and above all with the numerous socio-religious associations (*guthis*), which uphold its ritual life. The social life of the Newars in Sankhu is highly organised. Many socio-religious associations (*guthis*) are active in carrying out complex rituals. These *guthis* have their roots in antiquity. Licchavi inscriptions such as the one found in Lele (dated AD 604)<sup>1</sup> already refer to *goṣṭhi* (the Sanskrit word from which *guthi* is derived) carrying out rituals and social work. The most important *guthi* in Newar society are the *sī guthi* and *sanā guthi*, which are associations for carrying out funeral rites. They are caste-bound and determine a person's social identity.

Everyone has to be a member of a *guthi*. These associations, which sometimes have other functions as well, are typical of Newar society and make it distinct from other communities in South Asia. In this book special attention is given to the socio-religious associations, and in particular to the *sī guthi* and *sanā guthi* funeral associations.

## Purpose of the research

The history of Sankhu is fascinating, but has so far neither been studied in detail nor been the subject of any published monograph. This book presents details of the town's myths, history and society. It will be the first to provide a complete socio-religious analysis of the town. Besides the legendary stories, the attested history of the town is also of great importance. No archaeological excavations have thus far been carried out that throw light on the early history of the town. Only a few Licchavi inscriptions testify to its antiquity.

In Newar society it is hard to discern a division between Hindus and Buddhists except at the priestly level (Brahmins as Hindu priests, Vajrācārya as Buddhist priests): generally people employ Buddhist or Hindu priests according to the religious occasion. The elaborate caste system of the Newars adds to the complexity of the society. On the one hand the different castes are separate (twenty-two in Sankhu), but on the other, they are also dependent on each other. In this research, I have attempted to understand the social organisation of Sankhu from the perspectives of (a) caste distribution; (b) their duties; and (c) the *guthi* and their socio-cultural responsibilities.

In the last decade, certain ritual practices have disappeared because of economic constraints. Most socio-religious associations are dependent on land endowments that are cultivated by tenants. Since the land reforms of

I also focus on the oral and mythical aspect of the town's history, rituals and traditions, feasts and festivals. People in the town feel the myths are important because they believe they assert their historic past. However, they are well aware of the differences between a mythical past and their historical past, as has been shown by Oosten for the Inuit (1976:42).

### **Fieldwork and sociographic survey**

Although I was already acquainted with the town and its social life, I carried out thorough field research from April 1997 to January 1998 and from January to March 2000. I designed detailed questionnaires to collect information on the myths, history and topography of the town. I also constructed questions regarding social structure, aimed at the different castes, their functions, inter-caste relationships, occupations, income, and so on. The questions also dealt with the social life of the town, including the division of castes into high and low, the Hindu-Buddhist mix, caste-bound life-cycle rituals, the uses of ritual specialists, and so on. There are more than eighty *guthi* in Sankhu, and to specify the *guthi* and their functions on different occasions I formulated elaborate questions, relating to the number of *guthi*, the kinds of *guthi*, the functions of the *guthi* and their financial resources (land endowments, memberships fees, business and so on). Many *guthi* have already disappeared from the town's cultural scene in recent times, and my questions also dealt with those *guthis* that no longer exist. My investigation also focused on the socio-economic situation, land distributions, employment situation, trade and business, including the political and administrative organisation of the town.

During fieldwork, observation of all ritual performances was a priority. This was possible in most cases, but in some cases it was not. My next step was to collect information through interviews with selected people involved in the ritual performances. I also further conducted a sociographic survey of the town. My intention was to get a total view of Sankhu's ritual complex.

At first, I hesitated over whether to conduct a survey of the whole town or of selected houses only. I eventually chose the first option, because a sample survey could not provide a significant overall view of Sankhu due to its multi-caste nature. I realised that a survey of the whole town would be time-consuming, but it was necessary in order to obtain a comprehensive result. My own resources were too limited for such a survey, but fortunately the members of the Friends of Sankhu (FoS) agreed to assist me. Such an intensive survey would never have been accomplished without their support.



Plate 1a A view of the town of Sankhu from google.earth.com (2007).

In June 1997, I prepared a six-page questionnaire for a social survey of the town. My questions addressed not only matters of ritual, but also other aspects of social life, such as intermarriage, inter-caste relationships and the material resources to support ritual activities. The results of the survey provide an overall view of the social conditions of the town as well as its socio-economic and cultural characteristics (Chapter 6). The data also contained information about the distribution of land, types of land, occupations, the number of *guthi* in Sankhu, their activities and the people involved in them. In addition, historical information on those *guthi* that have disappeared and the causes of their disappearance were gathered. Information was also provided on caste membership, the relationships

1964 in Nepal, the position of tenants, at least in the Kathmandu Valley, has improved considerably. Nowadays they can pay very little rent, sometimes nothing at all, without the risk of being expelled from the land. Due this diminishment of *guthi* revenues, however, many ritual activities observed today may not be sustainable over the years to come.

## Method of the research

The study of a complex literate society and its rituals poses many methodological problems. There are not only ritual practices, but also oral traditions and written texts to be considered. But the interpretation of oral traditions and written texts varies according to the practices and beliefs of the informants. This fact raises several problems regarding the relation between texts and the contexts in which they are used.

Many Indologists and anthropologists have ignored the problem altogether. Anthropologists tend to ignore the texts, and Indologists study the texts only. The pioneering scholar Srinivas (1952) insists on the study of texts alongside people's beliefs and practices. He argues that the religious texts constitute a Sanskritic overlay of the actual beliefs and practices of specific communities. Tambiah (1970:372) also refuses to draw a distinction between popular and Sanskritic Hinduism, because the two levels are historically and contextually interwoven.

Following Tambiah's approach, I investigated ritual practices together with the relevant texts. Sankhu is my hometown, and I am thus familiar with most of the rituals practised here. I observed how they were practised and interviewed the people involved in them. In several cases it was not easy to witness the rituals, because some were practised in secret. The fire sacrifice, which takes place eight days before the procession of the goddess Vajrayoginī is "secret". Only the Vajrācārya priests with *dikṣā*, a priestly initiation, can attend. In Sankhu, the yearly offering of food to the ghosts, the nightly feeding of the virgin girl embodying the goddess Kumārī and the worship of Taleju during the festival of Mohanī also falls into this category. Nevertheless, I was able to observe many so-called "secret" rituals. In situations in which I was unable to observe their rituals directly, I obtained information by interviewing the people involved in them. A characteristic feature of Newar rituals is that they are related to castes and caste-bound *guthi*. Certain rituals can be confined to one caste, while others require the participation of many castes. The household survey I conducted in 1997 provided me with the exact number of people in each caste and information about their economy, their education and participation in different *guthi*.



between the various castes, and the Hindu-Buddhist interrelationship. Finally, the data presents the changes brought about by the discontinuation of caste-bound occupations.

A team of eleven members of the Friends of Sankhu was given two days training in preparation for conducting the survey. They were then sent to conduct an experimental test survey. Some practical changes to the questionnaire were subsequently made before it was printed. On 20 July 1997 they began carrying out the interviews, and they were completed on 15 August. Each interview took more than two hours, because of the elaborate nature of the questions. Altogether more than 1,700 working hours were spent on the survey. Only four families refused to answer the questionnaire. The members of Friends of Sankhu also assisted with a large part of the data processing.

## **Theoretical framework**

As Sankhu is a small town of 5,340 inhabitants, I was able to observe most rituals, including some that are performed in secrecy and kept “secret” to outsiders to the community. I was also able to obtain several unpublished ritual manuals, chronicles and inscriptions, which are discussed in this book for the first time.

Louis Dumont, who must be credited for breaking the barrier between Indology and anthropology by including textual studies in his study of Indian society, tends to see caste from an entirely Brahminical point of view. His theory of the social hierarchy (1980) – as based on the opposition between pure and impure – has, of course, been much criticised. Nepalese chronicles show that caste is neither a colonial nor orientalist invention (see Inden 1990), but was a fact of Newar society well before the British started their census operation in India. As Newar society is, as David Gellner puts it (1996:43–5), double-headed, with both Hindu and Buddhist priestly classes, it cannot be understood solely in the Brahminical idioms of pure and impure. Newar Brahmins are relatively few in number and share their tasks as Hindu priests with non-Brahmin officiants, the Karmācāryas, who are in charge of the temple of the royal goddess Taleju in Kathmandu. The apparent lack of unitary hierarchy, perhaps, led Dumont (1966:98) to state that the Newars do not have a caste system.

In this book, Newar castes and their traditional duties and recent changes are discussed in detail (Chapters 3, 7 and 8). Views on Newar caste have been elaborated in a volume, *Contested Hierarchies* (1995), characterised by the editors (Gellner and Quigley) as a “collaborative ethnography of caste among the Newars of the Kathmandu Valley, Nepal”.

The most important departure from Dumont's views is perhaps the central role of kingship in the caste system. First of all, the king does not, as Dumont has it, represent secular power, but, on the contrary, embodies the sacred nexus of the realm. Such a view had already been propounded by Heesterman (1957, 1971, 1978) on textual grounds and was first elaborated for Nepal by Greenwold (1975). It was also the king who could elevate the status of a caste, not the Brahmins. The caste order has been constantly subject to change, and it would be wrong to present it as a fixed Brahmin-oriented system. "The caste system as a whole was ordered in relation to the king", as Nicholas Dirks (1987: 284) has concisely put it in his *Ethnohistory of an Indian Kingdom*.

Although Sankhu has never been an independent kingdom, the town's rituals are full of references to kings. The study of Sankhu may enable the understanding of the changing relationships within the caste system and the notion of kingship. An ethnohistorical approach such as followed by Dirks (1987) and Kolff (1990) would certainly be enlightening.

Rather than a "little kingdom", as Dirks (1987:5) characterises<sup>2</sup> the small princely state of Pudukkottai in South India, Sankhu is a "ritual kingdom" with its own mythical history, but which, in recorded history, has often shifted hands between the kings of Bhaktapur and Kathmandu. It is very likely that, in the course of this process, Sankhu from time to time obtained a princely status – either according to the old Nepalese custom of shared kingship (*dvairājya* or *ardharājya*) or as part of a struggle for the succession. Even during the reign of the last Malla king of Kathmandu, the beleaguered Jayaprakas (1735–68), rebellious nobles made his brother king of five villages, of which Sankhu was doubtlessly the most important (Wright 1877:223). Although the *lāyku* (palace) has now been demolished, Sankhu still has a temple of Taleju, the Malla tutelary goddess.

Both mythical and historical kings took their refuge in Sankhu.<sup>3</sup> In a variant of the story of (creative) self-immolation of Mañicūḍa, it was king Vikramāditya who was beheaded by his own son to end a drought in the kingdom (of Nepal). His head flew to Vajrayoginī and is still worshipped in Guṃbāhāḥ. The first historical king to take refuge in Sankhu was the Licchavi king Mānadeva, about whom the fourteenth-century text *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī*, in a significant repetition of the same theme, tells that he observed penance at Guṃvihāra after unwittingly killing his father. "By the merit of these penances a great *caitya* emerged on the hillock."<sup>4</sup>

Sacrifice is also at central to the Vajrayoginī festival; while the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival is concluded with a fire sacrifice called *aśvamedha*, in which violent features are notably absent. All parallels with classical texts – whether Hindu or Buddhist – as well as the use of Sanskrit

terminology, should not divert our attention from the fact that the subject of this study is Newar culture. In his concise study, *Religion in Nepal*, Karel van Kooij (1978:5) points to characteristics “which are not particularly Hindu or Buddhist or which cannot be satisfactorily explained in terms of syncretism”, but which belong to a common Newar background.

The goddess Vajrayoginī is also called Ugratārā, a Buddhist designation, but she is most commonly referred as the Red-faced Mother (in the pagoda-type temple of Sankhu) and as the Yellow-faced Mother (in the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple). The town itself may evoke associations with the Sanskrit word for conch shell (and is thus accredited with that form), but the Newar name for the town is Sakva, most often interpreted as meaning “below Tibet”. Nearly all Sanskrit names in use, whether for place names or for divinities, have their different Newar equivalents, as mentioned by K.P. Malla (1981:5–23).

Every study of Newar culture must therefore take into account the existence of several overlays in the fields of language and religious content. The Hindu-Buddhist overlay is already predominant in the first Sanskrit inscriptions, but the Newar substratum has never disappeared. On the contrary, from the fourteenth century onwards the Newar language (Nepāl bhāṣā or Nepal bhasa) began to assert itself as a literary language side by side with Sanskrit (Malla 1982). Significantly, the present-day ritual texts are often composed in a mixed Newār-Sanskrit language, and as such constitute a true reflection of the fabric of Nepalese ritualism.

### **Focus and relevance of the study**

The Newar way of life is thoroughly ritualised, to such an extent that it is impossible to separate society from a domain called “religion”. Gérard Toffin’s major contribution to Newar ethnography, *Société et religion chez les Néwar du Népal*, concludes that the Kathmandu Valley was “une société innervée par la religion” (1984:593–6), as expressing a contradiction.

The second characteristic of Newar society is its far-reaching urbanisation, and in this regard the approach followed by both Gopal Singh Nepali in his pioneering study (1965) and by Gérard Toffin in his *magnum opus* (1984) is somehow confusing. Both authors move from the village to the town level and contrast rural with urban culture. The opposition seems valid in Toffin’s case, but then, the one-caste endogamous village, which he selected, is a marginal one and not a typical Newar settlement. Furthermore, the village in question engages people from other villages to meet its ritual needs and is thus linked with a wider ritual network.

Nepali's case of Panga village has as many houses as Toffin's example. Toffin's meticulous description of Panauti (2,902 inhabitants) provides an example for the study of a bigger town like Sankhu, and leads one towards viewing the Kathmandu Valley as an urbanised area. It is not a rural area containing a few towns, but is a basically urban environment that is supported by very fertile and intensively cultivated fields. Towns, villages and cities are linked up in a valley-wide network.

The main hypothesis of this study is that the distinct entities in this urban-oriented society are not defined by socio-economic features but by their ritual practices. A few urban settlements have kept their importance throughout the centuries because of their strategic locations. Pharping at the south-western entry of the valley and Sankhu at its north-eastern exit are examples. Yet, it will be held that these towns also fit the pattern of being ceremonially rather than socio-economically defined units.

More recent is the development of a royal centre at Bhaktapur, which was first the capital of Nepal (i.e., of the Kathmandu Valley and some extensions along trade routes) during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries; then, one of the three-competing Malla kingdoms (Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Patan) from the late fifteenth century up until the Gorkhā conquest of 1769. Bhaktapur is the only Newar town on which a monograph has been written (Levy 1990), although the author states that its 770 pages make up only the first of a two-part volume. Interestingly, Levy uses his study of a Tahitian village society as a background and an implicit frame of reference for his description of Bhaktapur: "It would be difficult to find two non-Western communities that are more different from each other." It is this contrast that causes him perceive, in a very unprejudiced way, the central importance of religious organisation in the fabric of what he calls an "archaic city" drawing on particular cultural resources. It is hardly possible for Levy to give an exhaustive picture of the symbolic organisation of a town such as Bhaktapur (40,000 inhabitants), and the result is a harmonious model of a traditional Newar city, an "ideal type". Levy admits that his reconstruction is for the greater part based on "conceptions and descriptions of elite informants, specialists of various kinds, but above all Rājopādhyāy Brahmins. How the ideal system is experienced, represented, and known by others in the city and what is its ontological status for people is the subject of another work." (Levy 1990:9–10).

The ritual organisation of Sankhu is as pervasive as that of Bhaktapur, but there is no elite who could give an undisputed ideal model of it. Rājopādhyāy Brahmins fulfil important functions in Sankhu, both as domestic priests of the higher castes and as principal officiants in the

Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival, but they do not originate from the town. Despite Sankhu composition from as many as twenty-two Newar castes, it is not ritually self-sufficient: its Brahmin priests belong to Patan and come to Sankhu in annual turns. Likewise, Karmācārya priests have to be called in from outside. The Buddhist Vajrācārya are native to Sankhu, serve as family priests and are in charge of the town's main festival (Vajrayoginī); as are Joṣṭī priests, who serve as assistants to the Rājopādhyāy and as priests of the temple of Taleju in Sankhu. This research notes that the town once was under a predominantly Buddhist influence and that the role of Brahmins has increased in recent times at the expense of their Buddhist colleagues.

By comparison with Sankhu, the capital of Kathmandu represents a relatively recent ritual configuration that started to develop only when Ratna Malla made it the capital of his independent city-state in AD 1482. The attraction of Kathmandu is that its rituals revolve around a royal centre that is still the seat of royal power (Van den Hoek 1990, 1993, 1994). On the other hand, it also became the capital of the modern state of Nepal and saw an influx of immigrants, something that complicates the future of its ritual activities.

Sankhu is directly linked with Kathmandu, the capital of the modern state of Nepal. Politically, Sankhu belongs to the district of the capital. Economically, the modern metropolis offers employment to a number of its inhabitants; spatially, Kathmandu is rapidly expanding towards Sankhu. Traffic between Kathmandu and Sankhu used to be irregular, but now there is a bus service running between Sankhu and the capital every twenty minutes. Modern provisions are relatively few and inconspicuous in Sankhu, yet there is an office of the Nepal Bank Limited, a post office and there are several schools. Therefore, although the main hypothesis of the proposed study is that Sankhu is a ritually defined universe in its own right, modern influences and their impacts on the town's rituals are also taken into account. In order to chart these influences and to obtain a balanced view of the town's dynamics, I also carried out a sociographic survey.

## **Arrangement of chapters**

A total of sixteen chapters are included in this book. This, the first, has provided a general introduction. Chapter 2 discusses calendars in Nepal, so as to provide basic information on how rituals are related the lunar calendar; Chapter 3 provides the historical background of Newar society and discusses its position in present-day Nepal; Chapter 4 presents mythological and historical accounts of the town. Chapter 5 gives an

overall view of the town in terms of its geographical and topographical details, it also supplies details on the town's pantheon, settlement, houses, art and architecture. Moreover, this chapter stresses the religious and ritual importance of the town. Chapter 6 supplies quantitative data from the household survey carried out in 1997. The results of the survey tell us the socio-economic and cultural characteristics of the town in some detail. Chapter 7 covers castes and their duties, and Hindu and Buddhist interrelations in Newar society. Chapter 8 provides an all-encompassing view of funeral associations, with an in-depth description of a secret feast celebrated by one of the Śreṣṭha caste's funeral associations. Chapter 9 presents a detailed account of the socio-religious *guthi* responsible for carrying out various feasts, festivals, processions of gods and goddesses, and other religious activities in the town. In Chapter 10 I give an account of all feasts, fasts, festivals, and processions of gods and goddesses that are celebrated in town according to a ritual calendar. In this chapter the significance of such festivals and ritual activities is also discussed. Chapter 11 is specifically concentrated on the festival of Svanti, which is celebrated during the time that the lunar calendars are changed. It is a major festival that is celebrated by all the Newars in Nepal and beyond. Chapter 12 provides a detailed account of the town's second most important festival, the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Vrata, presenting the historical background and ritual details of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and Svasthānī traditions in Nepal, and a critical view on the relations between these two traditions. The self-emanated goddess Vajrayoginī, who is believed to be the creator of the town and its ritual complex, is the goddess most revered by the people of Sankhu. Chapter 13 presents the mythology, history and physical appearance of the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, the iconographic details of the goddess, and an account of some important rituals performed at the sanctuary, including some notes about the repainting of the fixed statue of the goddess Vajrayoginī carried out once every twelve years. Her processional statues are also occasionally repainted. Chapter 14 carries a detailed account of rituals performed during the festival and procession of the goddess Vajrayoginī. Besides feasts, festivals, fasts and pilgrimages, the masked dances of various deities are another feature of Newar society important for religion. In Sankhu the dances of Devī (Devī *pyākham*) are considered to be the most important manifestations of the goddess Vajrayoginī, the chief deity of the town. Chapter 15 presents the visible and invisible aspects of these dances, such as the role of the dance association (*pyākham guthi*) and its social network, and the duties of priests and dancers during the rituals. Finally,

the last chapter provides a summary and overall conclusion, with a discussion of continuity and changes in the town.

## CHAPTER TWO

# RITUAL AND CALENDARS IN NEPAL

### Introduction

In the history of Nepal we see the use of several eras (Samvat). The government in celebrates its New Year and the change its official Vikram calendar on the first day of Baiśākh, in April. Similarly, people of Tibetan or Mangol origin in Nepal, such as the Tamang, Sherpa and Gurung, celebrate their New Year festivals – Tolā Lhosār, Soyanām Lhosār and Gyalo Lhosār, respectively – at different times of the year. Many people in Nepal also celebrate New Year on the first day of January with the change of Gregorian calendar. However, only the Vikram Samvat, a solar-based calendar, is recognised as an official calendar in Nepal, with other calendars not receiving any such recognition. But all the feasts and festivals celebrated in Nepal are based on the lunar calendar. In many calendars, four eras, namely Vikram (established 56/57 BC), Śaka, Śākya or Śāke (AD 78/79), Manadeva (AD 605) and the Nepal (AD 879) are the most prominent. There are others, such as the Sristitogatābdah (from the time of creation – 1,955,833,101 BC), Kaligata (3,102 BCE), Buddha (543 BCE) and Laksmāna Sena eras and, most recently, the Tribhuvan era (AD 1951). Apart from the Laksmāna Sena and Manadeva eras, the others are found printed on the front page of most of the Almanacs (*pañcāṅga*) published in Nepal to this today.

At present three calendar systems are in use in Nepal. They are the solar-based Vikram Samvat (Vikram Era), used by Nepal Government; the Christian calendar used by international organisations, Nepal Government, firms and individuals; and the lunar-based calendars. For our purposes, I discuss the lunar-based Nepal Samvat (Nepal Era) that is used by the Newars to celebrate traditional feasts and festivals. The Royal Nepal Calendar Decision Committee (*Nepal Rājākīya Pañcāṅga Nirṇāyaka Samiti*), a body composed of astrologers, is authorised to publish Samvat calendars. They publish these towards the beginning of the solar month of Baiśākha (March/April) to mark the New Year of the solar-based Vikram



Era. Although the aim of the Royal Nepal Calendar Decision Committee is to serve the government by providing a solar-based calendar, their calendars also include a detailed lunar calendar along with Christian dates. They print three dates in one: *gate*, *tithi* and *tārikha*, based on Vikram or Bikram, Nepali or lunar and Gregorian calendars, respectively. Their method of presenting a lunar calendar is based on Indian astrological systems,<sup>1</sup> so that there are only minor differences between the Indian and the Nepalese lunar calendars.

**Table 1: The eras with established and current year in 2011 AD**

Name	Established Year	Current year (2011)
Sriṣṭitogatābdaḥ	1,955,833,101 BCE	1,955,835,112
Kaligata Saṃvat	3100 BCE	5111
Buddha Saṃvat	544 BCE	2555
Vikram Saṃvat	AD 57	2068
Śāke Saṃvat	AD 79	1932
Mānadev Saṃvat	AD 605	1405
Nepal Saṃvat	AD 879	1131

A king named Vikramāditya is believed to have originated the Vikrama era in Ujjain, India. However, many scholars consider him a legendary ruler, while others assert that he was a historical figure.<sup>2</sup> He is also identified with king Manadeva I in Nepalese legends. At its inception, the change of the year in the Vikram era used to be in the month of Kārtika, but by the medieval period (twelfth to eighteenth century AD), it had become Caitrādi, or the ending in the month of Caitra. It is no longer used in Nepal as a lunar calendar, but is now a solar calendar.

In Nepal, the lunar year begins either in the spring or autumn. If it begins in the spring, it is known as Caitrādi; and if in the autumn, it is known as Kārttikādi. The first one is known as Pūrṇmāntaka, and ends on a full-moon day; while the latter one is Amāntaka and ends on the new moon. Pūrṇmāntaka month begins from Kṛṣṇapakṣa, the dark side of the moon, while the Amāntaka month begins from Śuklapakṣa (the bright side). Occasionally in a span of many years, a Kṣayamāsa, or disappearance of a month, also occurs in a lunar calendar.

In the Kathmandu Valley, a lunar-based Nepalese calendar called the Nepal era was introduced on 20 October 879. Malla rulers in the Valley of Nepal used the Nepal era as the official calendar till their rule ended in 1769, when, after the Gorkhā conquest, the Shah rulers began to use the

Śāke era calendar, while continuing simultaneous use of the Nepal-era calendar. The Rana Prime Minister Candra Shamser introduced the Vikram era as the official calendar in Nepal only in 1911. As Nepalese historians state, the reason why the lunar calendar was replaced with the solar calendar was because the shrewd and despotic Rana Prime Minister wanted to cut down the burden of paying salaries for the thirteenth month to government staff every two years. Recently, in 1999, Saṃkhadhar Sakhvāla, the founder of the Nepal era, has been declared a national icon of Nepal. Nepalese people have taken this decision as a gesture that recognises the Nepal era as a national era, but the Nepalese government continues to use the Vikram era as the only official calendar of Nepal.

The New Year's Day according to the Nepal calendar is celebrated on the first day of Kachalā in the month of Kārtik (October/November). The names of the months of this calendar are in the Newar language. Although all lunar months of the Nepal era are in Newar names, people use the Sanskrit terms simultaneously. Usually, there are twelve months in a lunar year, but an extra month emerges after every twenty-seven months in the lunar calendar. This extra month is known as Analā in the Newar language, and as Adhika Māsa in Indian calendars. Names of months in the Nepal era with their Sanskrit equivalents and Christian months are listed below:

**Table 2: Names of the months**

Newar	Sanskrit/Khas-Nepali	Christian
1. Kachalā	Kārtik/Mārga	October/November (X, XI)
2. Thiṃlā	Mārga/Pauṣa	November/December (X, XII)
3. Pohelā	Pauṣa/Māgha	December/January (XII, I)
4. Sillā	Māgha/Phālguna	January/February (I, II)
5. Cillā	Phālguna/Caitra	February/March (II, III)
6. Caulā	Caitra/Baiśākha	March/April (III, IV)
7. Bachalā	Baiśākha/ Jetha	April/May (IV, V)
8. Tachalā	Jetha/Āśāḍha	May/June (V, VI)
9. Dillā	Āśāḍha/Śrāvana	June/July (VI, VII)
10. Guṃlā	Śrāvana/Bhādra	July/August (VII, VIII)
11. Yaṃlā	Bhādra/Āśvina	August/September (VIII, IX)
12. Kaulā	Āśvina/Kārtik	September/October (IX, X)
13. Analā	Adhika Māsa	the extra month

A solar year consists of 365 days, while a lunar year consists of only 354 days. To cover the gap between the number of solar and lunar days, an extra month is added. The Analā or Adhika Māsa, the extra month, can fall during any period of a year. Usually an Analā month emerges after every twenty-seven months. The bright and dark halves of a lunar month, known as Śuklapakṣaḥ and Kṛṣṇapakṣaḥ, respectively, in other Indian calendars, are known as *thva* and *gā* in the Nepal era calendar. They are listed below:

**Table 3: Names of both halves of the lunar months**

Newar	Sanskrit/Khas-Nepali	
Kachalāthva	Kārtik Śukla	bright half
Kachalāgā	Mārga Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Thimlāthva	Mārga Śukla	bright half
Thimlāgā	Pausa Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Pohelāthva	Pausa Śukla	bright half
Pohelāgā	Māgha Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Sillāthva	Māgha Śukla	bright half
Sillāgā	Phālguna Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Cillāthva	Phālguna Śukla	bright half
Cillāgā	Caitra Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Caulāthva	Caitra Śukla	bright half
Caulāgā	Baiśākha Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Bachalāthva	Baiśākha Śukla	bright half
Bachalāgā	Jeṭha Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Tachalāthva	Jeṭha Śukla	bright half
Tachalāgā	Āśāḍha Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Dillāthva	Āśāḍha Śukla	bright half
Dillāgā	Śrāvana Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Guṃlāthva	Śrāvana Śukla	bright half
Guṃlāgā	Bhādra Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Yaṃlāthva	Bhādra Śukla	bright half
Yaṃlāgā	Āśvina Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Kaulāthva	Āśvina Śukla	bright half
Kaulāgā	Kārtik Kṛṣṇa	dark half
Analāthva	Adhika Śukla	extra bright half
Analāgā	Adhika Kṛṣṇa	extra dark half

## The influence of weekdays

The Newar people count Sunday (Āitabār) as the first day, Sombār (Monday) as the second, Maṅgalbār (Tuesday) as the third, Buddhabār (Wednesday) as the fourth, Bihibār (Thursday) as the fifth, Śukrabār (Friday) as the sixth and Śanibār (Saturday) as the last day of a week. Each of these days represents the sun, moon and the planets, and also carries specific meanings. Sunday is dedicated to the Sun, the powerful god, it is a good day to begin with any new work, but it is not a good day to take a bath. It is believed that it shortens one's life span if one takes a bath on this day. Monday is the day of the Moon. It is also a good day to worship the god Śiva. In particular, those who wish for children may observe a fast in the name of Śiva. When a new moon (Aumṣī) falls on Monday it adds values to the day. Those who wish for happiness and prosperity in their life take a fast and worship the *pipal* tree (*Ficus religiosa*) on such a day. This day is also considered to be a good day to take a bath, which makes one healthy and beautiful.

Tuesday (Mars) is dedicated to the god Gaṇeśa, and is considered to be a strong day. People consider it the best day to please Gaṇeśa, who is also considered to be the god of wisdom, health and wealth. On this day people avoid visiting close relatives or spending the night with them, as they consider it to be a day for disputes. Wednesday is dedicated to the planet Mercury and is considered to be a normal day, but not a good day to carry out any important work. On this day people avoid taking baths, as they believe it might wash away their wisdom. Thursday is the day of the planet Br̥haspati (Jupiter). This day is dedicated to the lineage god Digu *dyo*. They believe this day is the best for beginning any new job or for carrying out business and meeting people. People also make matrimonial decisions on Thursday. Friday is dedicated to Śukra (Venus). Pleasing Śukra can achieve happiness, but people avoid taking baths on this day too, because to do so would reduce happiness. Saturday is dedicated to the planet Śani (Saturn). It is considered to be a powerful day of the week. On this day people worship the god Śani, who removes obstructions. This day is also considered to be the best day to visit temples of the mother goddesses.

## *Tithi*, the lunar days

*Nhi* is the Newar word for “day”, and *tithi* is a “date”. For rituals, the lunar days (*tithi*) are most important. Usually, each bright and each dark half consist of fifteen days; sometimes there may be one day less or more, depending on the movement of the moon. Names of the lunar days are also

adopted from Sanskrit Middle-Indian (*apabhraṃśa*). All full-moon days and the fourteenth and fifteenth days of the dark half of the calendar have their own names in the Newar language. Usually, the names of the days of the full-moon correspond with the names of the months, but in many cases they have a different name according with a festival celebrated on that day.

**Table 4: The twelve full-moon days**

Name	Month
Sakimanā punhi	November
Yomari punhi	December
Milā punhi	January
Sipunhi	February
Holi punhi	March
Sakva punhi	April
Svāmyā punhi	May
Jyā punhi	June
Dilā punhi	July
Guṃ punhi	August
Yamyā punhi	September
Kati punhi	October
Analā punhi	Extra full moon day

Similarly, the names of the fourteenth day of each dark half have been given different names according to the festival celebrated on that day. They are generally known as Carhe in Newar language. They are listed below:

**Table 5: Twelve fortnights (Carhe)**

Name	Month
Svanticarhe	October/November
Bālācarhe	November/December
Diśīcarhe	December/January
Laiṃcarhe	January/February
Silācarhe	February/March
Pahāṃcarhe	March/April
Mātātīcarhe	April/May
Sithīcarhe	May/June

Dilācarhe	June/July
Gathām̐mugaḥcahre	July/August
Pañjārām̐carhe	August/September
Nalāsanecarhe	September/October
Analācarhe	Extra fortnight

In the year when an Analā month appears, the name of the full-moon day is called Analā punhi and the fourteenth day of the dark half is called Analācarhe. The twelve full-moon days (Punhi), twelve fourteenth days of dark half (Carhe), twelve new-moon days (Aum̐sī) and eleventh days (Ekādaśī) of both dark and bright halves are days that are religiously more significant for devout Newars. Sometimes, different days in a lunar month also received their names according to a festival celebrated on that particular day. In general, the names of days in a lunar month can be listed below. Where they are different from Sanskrit or Khas-Nepali, the Newar names are given in brackets:

Thva or Śukla Pakṣaḥ (the bright half or first fortnight of a month):

1. Pratipadā/Parevā (Pāru)
2. Dvitiyā (Dutiya)
3. Tṛtiyā
4. Cauthī
5. Pañcamī
6. Ṣaṣthī (Khasti)
7. Saptamī
8. Aṣṭamī
9. Navamī (Naḥmi)
10. Daśamī
11. Ekādaśī (Ekārśī)
12. Dvādaśī (Dvārsī)
13. Trayodaśī
14. Caturdaśī
15. Purnimā (Punhi)

Gā or Kṛṣṇa Pakṣa (the dark half or second fortnight of a month):

16. Pratipadā /Parevā (Pāru)
17. Dvitiyā (Dutiya)
18. Tṛtiyā
19. Cauthī
20. Pañcamī

21. Ṣaṣṭhī (Khasti)
22. Saptamī
23. Aṣṭamī
24. Navamī (Naḥmī)
25. Daśamī
26. Ekādaśī (Ekārśī)
27. Dvādaśī (Dvārsī)
28. Trayodaśī
29. Caturdaśī (Carhe)
30. Auṃsī (Āmai)

There are several occasions that make any particular day of any month religiously important. These are:

1. The first day of Kachalāthva (Mha pūjā or the New Year's day)
2. The second day of Kachalāthva (Kija pūjā)
3. The ninth day of Kachalāthva (Jugādi Navamī)
4. The eleventh of Kachalāthva (Haribodhinī Ekadaśī)
5. The fifth day of Thimlāthva (Bibāha Pañcamī)
6. The first day of Māgha month (Ghyocakusalhu)
7. The fifth day of Sillāthva (Śrīpañcamī),
8. The seventh day of Sillāthva (Lagalāsaptamī).
9. The eleventh and twelfth day of Sillāthva (Bhimsen Ekādaśī and Dvādaśī).
10. The eighth (Caitra Dasain) and ninth day of Cillāthva (Rām Navamī).
11. The third day of Bachalāthva (Akṣayatṛtiyā).
12. The sixth day of Tachalāthva (Sithinakhaḥ).
13. The tenth of Tachalāthva (Daśaharā).
14. The eighth day of Tachalāgā (Bhalabhala Aṣṭamī).
15. The first of Guṃlāthva (the beginning of sacred Buddhist month of Guṃlā).
16. The fifth day of Guṃlāthva (Nāgapañcamī).
17. The first day of Guṃlāgā (Sāpāru).
18. The eighth day of Guṃlāgā (Kṛṣṇajanmāṣṭamī).
19. The first day of Yaṃlāthva (Pāru pūjā).
20. The fourth day of Yaṃlāthva (Cathā).
21. The third day of Yaṃāgā (Gātilā).
22. The eighth, ninth and tenth days of Kaulāthva (Mohanī festival).

## CHAPTER THREE

# THE SIGNIFICANCE OF NEWAR CULTURE AND SOCIETY

The town of Sankhu is inhabited by Newars, and is in many respect is representative of Newar society in general. Therefore, I first provide a general description of Newar society before moving on to a discussion of Newar society in Sankhu. This description also covers the historical background, myths, present position and other important aspects of Newar society. This chapter outlines the components of Newar identity, which is variable, depending on caste, religion and socio-religious associations (*guthi*). At present, Newar intellectuals are trying to preserve their language (Nepalbhasa) and culture as the most important aspects of their unity or national identity. For the past two decades, they have been vigorously pressing for equal rights for their language and culture in a Nepalese state dominated by Khas language and culture. In this chapter I also describe Newar nationalism.

### Introduction

The 2001 census shows that the total population of Nepal is 23.2 million. Nepal is a plural society: multi-cultural, multi-lingual and multi-religious. The Newars are the original inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley, the population of which in 2001 comprised 1,245,232.<sup>1</sup> Although Newars live in every region of Nepal, and beyond its boundaries in India, the majority is concentrated in the Kathmandu Valley. Previously, the Kathmandu Valley was known by the name “Nepal”, and for many people the word “Nepal” still means the Kathmandu Valley. The Newars speak Nepalbhasa, a Tibeto-Burman language with a rich ancient (and modern) literature that goes back to the fourteenth century AD. During the Malla reign, from the thirteenth to eighteenth century, the Kings promoted literature in Nepalbhasa, as well as in other languages such as Maithili, Avadhi, Bhojpuri and Bengali. For fifteen centuries, a Sanskrit literary tradition was cultivated in the Kathmandu Valley. The Malla courts



patronised all languages, classical and vernacular, without discrimination. The extent of the literary traditions in other languages indicates the cosmopolitan nature of the Malla courts (Malla 1982:7). The bulk of the rich tradition of Newar art, architecture, ritual and culture dates back to this period.

After the Gorkhā conquest (1769), the new rulers gradually replaced the Newar language, the Nepalbhāsa with Gorkhālī or Parvatiyā which since the 1930s has begun to be called Nepali and has been the only official language of Nepal. During the Rana rule (1846–1951), all writings in the Newar language were forbidden, and a group of Newar elite was provoked to defy the government policy. The suppression, or rather the reaction against it, gave birth to a modern literature written in the Newar language and the rise of a devoted literary intelligentsia. When the Rana regime ended in 1950, the Newar language was taught in schools, and the news in this language began to be broadcast on Radio Nepal. During the thirty years of the Panchayat regime (1960–90), the Newar language was again suppressed, as the government imposed a one-language policy. The Newars peacefully protested. It seems that the notion of ethnic nationalism in Newar society emerged only towards the end of the 1970s. Eventually, in 1995, the National Forum of the Newars (*Nevāḥ De Dabū*) was established, with the aim of asserting ethnic national rights. Rapidly, the National Forum of the Newars received broad support from the Newars in every part of the Kathmandu Valley and beyond. At present, the major demands of the Newars are equal status for their language and culture, and the right to autonomy.

Newar nationalist movements are deeply rooted among the educated, but the emergence of Newar nationalism is a recent phenomenon, and has to do with the unequal treatment of language and the negligence of culture by the state.<sup>2</sup>

### **Origins and myths of the Newars**

The word “Newar” is nowadays commonly used to indicate the people living in the Kathmandu Valley, and those people who speak Newar (Nevār) or Nepalbhāṣā as their mother tongue elsewhere in Nepal and in India. There are several myths regarding the origin of the Newars. Most scholars believe that the Newars are the earliest known inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley. They accept that the Newar speakers lived in the Valley of Nepal from prehistoric times. Many scholars believe the Newars are the descendants of the Kirāta, who ruled Nepal before the Licchavis in the Valley. Certain groups amongst the Newar, such as the Jyāpus (the

farmers) and the Po (the sweepers and guardians of temples of the mother goddesses) are sometimes referred to as the true descendants of the Kirātas. However, the Kirātas left no documents to prove their rule in the valley beyond a list of names of their kings found in the oldest chronicle of Nepal, the Gopālarājavamsāvalī, and the nineteenth-century chronicles such as the Bhāṣāvamsāvalī. Some of the inhabitants of eastern Nepal, such as the Limbu and Rāi, also claim descent from the Kirātas. The Newars share some vocabulary with Limbu and Rāi. Linguistically, Newar, Limbu and Rāi languages are classified as Tibeto-Burman languages. These reasons, too, have been used to justify that linkage of the Newars with the Kirātas.<sup>3</sup>

Some think that the Newars are the descendants of the Nāyars of Kerala in south India. Colonel Kirkpatrick was the first person to indicate, briefly, the similarities of Newar customs with those of the Nāyars of the Malabar Coast of India, but his comparison was without any further explanation (1811:187). Later, Gopal Singh Nepali attempted to show a relationship between the Newars and the people of Kerala in his book *The Newars*, first published in 1965 (1988:28–30). One of his arguments was the similarity of *ihī*, the ritual marriage performed for the Newar girl children, with the *tālliketu*, a ritual performed for the girls in Kerala (Nepali 1988:106). However, besides the incidental similarities between *ihī* and *tālliketu* there are no other grounds for any relation between the Newars and the Nāyars of Kerala, and Nepali has been criticised by various scholars for his illusive comparison of these two groups.

Another argument claims that the Newars are migrants from Tibet. This links the origin of the Newars with the creation of the Valley of Nepal, which is believed to be a creation of the great saint, Mañjuśrī. It says that Mañjuśrī descended from Tibet and cleaved the gorge of Cobhār with his sword to drain away water from the primordial lake of the Valley so as to make it an inhabitable place. This argument goes that the people who came with Mañjuśrī from Tibet settled in the Valley and that their descendants began to be called Newars. However, there are conflicting views about Mañjuśrī. Many scholars believe that he came from India, arrived in Nepal and then went on to Tibet (Pradhan 1998), though Swayambhu Lal Shrestha claims that he is a Nepali (1986:106). The legend of Mañjuśrī is related to the Buddhist tradition. In the Hindu tradition, it was the Lord Viṣṇu in the form of Kṛṣṇa, who ordered his son Pradhumna to cleave the gorge of Cobhār, thus making the Kathmandu Valley inhabitable (Amatya 1996:3 and Slusser 1998:8).

For centuries, the Kathmandu Valley remained a trade centre, and people from other areas came there to do business. Therefore, it is natural

that it has been a melting pot of different peoples for a considerable time. Oldfield rightly suggested that the Newars have both Indian and Tibetan cultural influences. He also stressed that their religion represents a corresponding mixture of Indian and Tibetan creeds (1981:73). Brown stressed that the Newars emigrated from the area of Tibet, and settled down in Nepal, intermingling with other local people (Brown 1912:32). For more than two millennia, the Nepal Valley was not only the centre of Newar culture, was also a centre of a South Asian civilisation, and a place of cultural assimilation. It will be clearer from further discussion below that the word “Newar” itself is a recent one that began to be popularised only after the Gorkhā conquest of the Valley in 1769.

### History of the Newars

Etymologically, the word “Newar” is identical with the place name “Nepāl”. Linguists such as Ralph L. Turner assert that the words Nevār, Nevāl and Nepāl all developed from the word “Nepal” or “Nevār”.<sup>4</sup> There are conflicting views about the origin of the word “Nepāl”. Malla confirms that an inscription from AD 512 of Vasantadev of Tistung is the first evidence that the word Nepāl was used for the people of Nepal.<sup>5</sup> According to the oldest chronicle of Nepal, the Gopālarājavamśavalī, the Kirātas ruled Nepal for thirty-two generations (Vajrācārya and Malla 1985:121–2). There is no recorded history of the Kirātas, only their successors, the Lichhavis, who ruled Nepal from the second to the ninth century AD, have left a corpus of inscriptions – written in impure Sanskrit. By analysing the place and river names in those inscriptions, K.P. Malla concluded that, although the Licchavi rulers were inclined to use Sanskrit, the language spoken by the people belonged to the Tibeto-Burman stock. He thinks it likely that the names of places found in the inscriptions are an archaic form of Nepalbhasa.<sup>6</sup> According to Gellner (1995:5) “The Nepalbhasa seems to have been spoken by the inhabitants of the Kathmandu Valley as far back as the records go.” Bista (1976:16) writes, “The Newar people had been settled in the Nepal Valley since prehistoric time.”

After the Lichhavis, the Thakuris ruled Nepal from the ninth to the twelfth centuries. Little historical evidence has been found from this period.

Since the Kathmandu valley was the centre of trade, culture and civilisation, the Gorkhā conquerors had to accommodate the Newars to the modern state of Nepal. A section of Newar traders virtually welcomed the Gorkhā conquest, and continued to strengthen their position (Quigley

1987). However, many Newar inhabitants fought against the Gorkhā invaders and afterwards received capital punishment, or exile, for doing so. People from areas such as Kirtipur and Patan were badly tortured.<sup>7</sup>

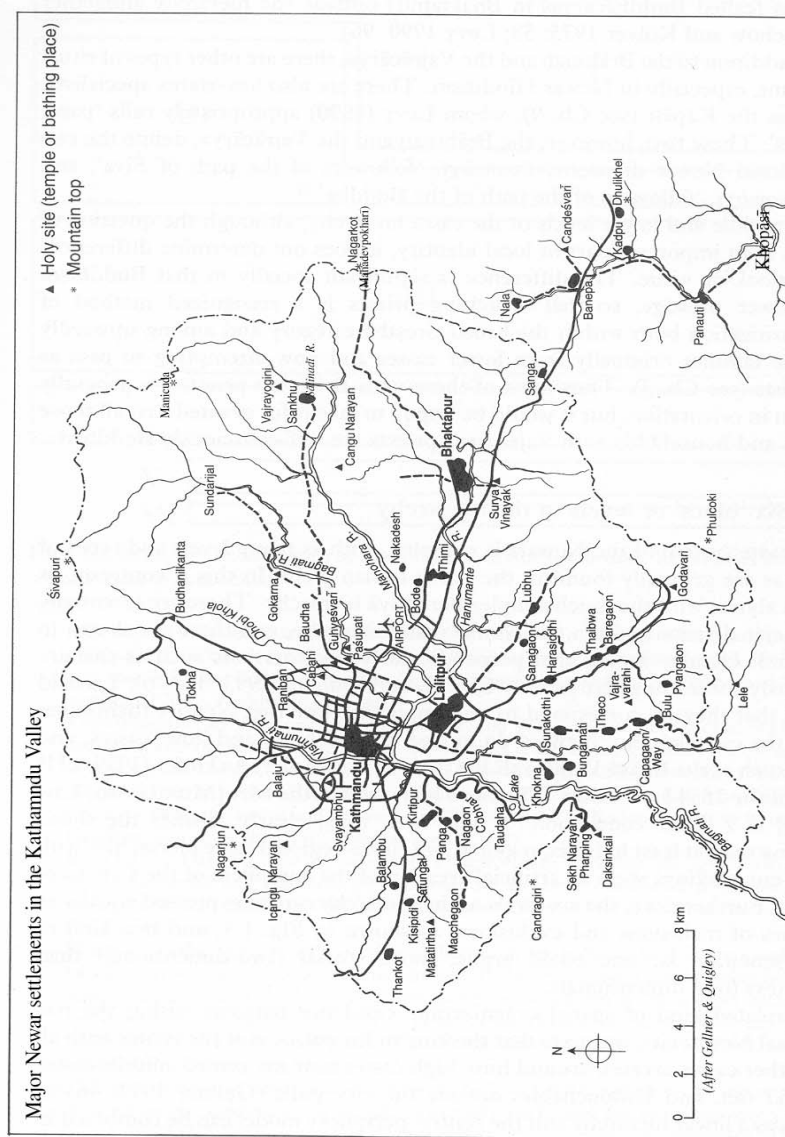
To a certain extent, the Gorkhā rulers continued to support the culture and traditions of the Newars. By using the palace of the Malla kings, the Gorkhā kings also accepted Newar court customs. Many feasts and festivals of the Newars were royally supported. As traders, the Newars received ample opportunities to develop their profession under Gorkhā rule. They spread all over the Kingdom and opened shops wherever they went. Many new Newar settlements appeared outside the Kathmandu valley.<sup>8</sup> The 2001 population census of Nepal reports that Newars are spread in all the seventy-five districts of the country. However, in many of these districts their numbers are very low (HMG CBS 1993:236–311).

### **Caste system and Newar castes**

The main root of the caste system in South Asia is the Hindu Varṇāśrama system, which divides the whole of Hindu society into four social categories (*cār varṇa*): Brahmin, Kṣetri, Vaiśya and Śudra.<sup>9</sup> According to Hindu belief, the god Brahmā is the creator of the universe, of caste hierarchy and of the four castes. From his mouth, he created Brahmins, and from his arms came the Kṣetri. The Vaiśya were created from the thighs and the Śudra from the feet.<sup>10</sup> According to this belief, the Brahmins occupy the top of the hierarchy, followed by the Kṣetri, the Vaiśya and the Śudra.<sup>11</sup>

Although the caste system is a purely Hindu phenomenon, other communities living intimately with Hindus have been influenced by it. Even the Christians, who introduced a completely different religion into the South Asia, are here influenced by the Hindu hierarchical caste concept.<sup>12</sup> Muslims of the region also seem to have been influenced by the ideas about castes.<sup>13</sup>

The complexity and ambiguity of the caste system on the Indian subcontinent has proved one of the most fascinating subjects for scholars involved in this region over the past century, and will remain so for many years to come. An abundant literature on the caste system has been produced: from Bouglé to Hocart, Weber to Dumont, and Quigley to Fuller, the discourse on castes continues without a break.<sup>14</sup> Among other publications, Declan Quigley's *Interpretation of Caste* can be considered one of the most remarkable contributions, because of its dynamic discussion of caste within the Indian subcontinent. These studies provide both historical insights into the caste system and a profound discussion of



Map 1: Major Newar settlements in the Kathmandu Valley

some of the earlier literature on the subject (Quigley 1993). In this section, I will neither discuss the nature of caste nor review the literature on the subject. Instead, I will present a brief discussion of caste structure in the Newar context.

One still needs to take into account the traditional idea of the caste system, however, because the caste structure of the Newar society is drawn from the same root as the Indian system.

The nineteenth-century *Bhāṣāvaṃśāvalī* chronicle credits the fourteenth-century king Jayasthiti Malla with introducing the caste system to the Nepal Valley (Lamsal 1966:37–50). However, Nepalese historians confirm that the caste system in Nepal already existed during the Licchavi rule (second to ninth century), and hold that king Jayasthiti Malla only reinforced or restructured it during his reign.<sup>15</sup> For this purpose, several Brahmins from India, who were masters of Hindu scriptures, assisted him. According to the *Bhāṣāvaṃśāvalī*, 725 different castes and sub castes were created during the reign of king Jayasthiti Malla. The *Bhāṣāvaṃśāvalī* does not, however, provide the names of all these castes, only presenting some detailed regulations for 53 different castes (Lamsal 1966:39). Hodgson, Hamilton and Oldfield also describe Newar castes and try to distinguish between Hindu and Buddhist Newar castes.<sup>16</sup> Chattopadhyay (1923:46–119) provides a more detailed treatment, and not only treats the lists of Hodgson, Hamilton, Oldfield and Lévi critically and comparatively, but also attempts a comparison with other caste system of the region. Chattopadhyay, who was entirely dependent on textual sources, saw that the lists he found did not match with each other and that the duties described for many castes were inaccurate. Regmi also discusses Newar caste structure in much detail and presents its historical background (1965:641–706).

The four levels of the Hindu *Varṇāśram* caste hierarchy apply to Parvate communities, but not to Newar society, as it is not a homogeneous Hindu society. It has Hindu Śaiva and Buddhist castes side by side. The adaptation of the Hindu caste structure by the Newar Buddhists is not easily explained, because, in principal, Buddhists oppose the Hindu caste system. Among Buddhist Newars we find caste hierarchies include the *Vajrācārya* and the *Śākya* as the top Buddhist priestly castes in parallel to the Hindu Brahmin priests. Therefore, Gellner is right to state that Newar society is double-headed because of the existence of these two different priestly castes (1992:43–5). As the *Vajrācāryas* perform priestly duties, people consider them as Buddhist Brahmins.<sup>17</sup> Below the Brahmin and *Vajrācārya* are other high castes, the *śyasyah* (Jośī, *Prādhān* and *Śreṣṭha*); below them are middle and lower castes, and “unclean” and “untouchable”

castes. It may be said that the hierarchical levels of the Newar castes are numerous. However, ranking will always remain a matter of dispute as claims and counter claims regarding the relative positions among castes remain unresolved.

Before the Gorkhā conquest, a social stratification did exist, but there was no written legal code until the implementation of the first legal code of Nepal, *Muluki Ain* in AD 1854, which subordinates all the Newar castes to the Parvate castes, despite the Newar's own caste stratification.<sup>18</sup> It ranks the Newar Brahmins not only below the Parvate Brahmins but also below the Kṣetris, and ranks the Newar Brahmins above all other Newar castes, including the Buddhist Vajrācārya priests.<sup>19</sup> Although the Newar Brahmins are legally ranked below the Parvate Brahmins, they claim higher position in the hierarchy. Marriage relations with the Parvate Brahmins are not permitted for the Rājopādhyāy Brahmins, and in case of such marriages their children are prohibited from performing priestly tasks for high-caste Newars. Newar Brahmins are relatively few in number, and share their priestly tasks with non-Brahmin assistants: the Joṣī astrologers and the Karmācāryas.<sup>20</sup> The apparent lack of unitary hierarchy, perhaps, led Dumont to state that the Newars do not have a caste system (1964:98).

No written evidence has yet been traced to define the exact structure of the caste system during the Malla period (thirteenth to eighteenth century). However, the nineteenth-century chronicles are believed to have written for the new rulers of Nepal to understand the Newar castes. The 1854 legal code came only after Prime Minister Jung Bahadur's return from England. Sharma assumes that Jung Bahadur was inspired by this visit to England to bring out the legal code to regulate traditional Nepalese society (1977:278). In the matters of caste stratification and caste-bound duties, the 1854 law is very detailed. It also defines in detail the punishments for misbehaviour by each caste.<sup>21</sup> The 1854 legal code continued to prevail, with amendments, until the end of the Rana regime or, more precisely, until king Mahendra introduced the New Legal Code, *Nayām Mulukī Ein* of Nepal in 1964.<sup>22</sup> With the introduction of this legal code, all restrictions regarding castes lost their legal ground, though it does not prevent people from continuing their traditional beliefs. Therefore, despite the New Legal Code, traditional caste distinctions continue today, as can clearly be seen in villages or small towns like Sankhu, and in a lesser degree in the cities of Kathmandu and Patan.

Von Fürer-Haimendorf provides the first field-based anthropological discourse on Newar society and discusses in detail its castes and hierarchy (1956:15–38). He distinguishes only four castes – the Deo Brahmin, Jhā Brahmin, the Śyasyah (Sheshyo) and the Jogi – as Hindu, and considers

the rest to be Buddhist castes. He rightly notes that all the Newars are pollution conscious and that maintenance of caste status is common even among the Buddhists (Von Fürer-Haimendorf 1956:23). Discussing caste hierarchies among the Newars, Rosser puts them into two categories – dominant (*gyupim*) and subordinate (*majyupim*) blocs – for the first he lists six levels and for the latter, three (1979:89). His table provides 26 different castes in Newar society, which he gathered from his survey of the 33 Newar settlements in the Kathmandu Valley (Rosser 1979:85–6). He saw a growing trend among the Śreṣṭhas of substituting their Gubhāju priests for Brahmins (1979:104).

Nepali's book *The Newars* was the first to provide an in-depth view on Newar social life and culture. Nepali divides the Newar caste system into six hierarchical blocs with twelve levels (1965:150). Gutschov and Kölver present a list of Newar castes for Bhaktapur, which ranks the Newars into nineteen levels.<sup>23</sup> Toffin presents more elaborate list of Newar castes in a hierarchical order in his monumental study of the Newars.<sup>24</sup> In Panauti, he records fifteen Newar castes, and considered ten as “pure” and three as “impure” castes. He classified the “pure” into three and the “impure” into two hierarchical levels (Toffin 1984:278–9). Presenting macro status levels (*thar*) of Newar Hindus in Bhaktapur, Levy lists thirty-one castes in a hierarchical manner, but he distinguishes three levels of Syasyah and three levels of Jyāpu. He puts the third category of Syasyah even below the Jyāpus, which is controversial (Levy 1992:78–85). More dynamic views of Newar castes have been elaborated in the work edited by Gellner and Quigley (1995), and the work of Parish (1997), *Hierarchy and Discontents*, is another intriguing study on the Newars with regard to caste complexity. Discussing Newar caste stratification, Parish tries to show sociological and psychological contradictions between untouchable and high castes. Gellner presents a pyramid image for the caste hierarchies, dividing them into six different levels.<sup>25</sup> Sharma also ranks the castes into a similar hierarchical chart (Sharma 1997:131–2).

Among the clean castes, there exist several internal layers and traditional hierarchies. These caste hierarchies can be seen when a marriage partner is selected. Newar castes maintain caste endogamy when finding marriage partners for both boys and girls. If they break this rule, there may be severe consequences. It is strictly forbidden to choose marriage partners from castes considered lower than one's own, although finding a partner from a higher caste than one's own is not penalised. Inter-caste marriage is a transgression of rules, and if a girl is married to somebody lower than her own caste, she loses her former caste. In the case that a man from a higher caste marries a girl from a lower caste, then their



children will belong to the mother's caste. A marriage between a clean and an unclean caste is more stigmatising for the higher caste, even if it is a man who has taken a girl of lower birth.<sup>26</sup> After the implementation of the New Legal Code, *Nayām Muluki Ain*, of Nepal in 1964 more liberal practices have been introduced. The concept of higher and lower caste is still prevalent. Especially in small towns like Sankhu, caste stigmatisation and caste discrimination are still obviously apparent. The degree of social control may depend on a person's social and economic status. One known case in Sankhu was a relationship between a man from a Jyāpu family and a woman from a Dom family. The man was not penalised by his caste funeral association (*sī Guthi*) or kin because he was a well-off and influential person.<sup>27</sup> In a small town like Sankhu, any mobility of castes is impossible.

### **Religious affiliations of the Newars**

From an early period, rulers in Nepal began patronising Hinduism,<sup>28</sup> and several successive dynasties were heavily influenced by it. However, inscriptional sources make it clear that although Licchavi Kings were Hindus, they treated Buddhism on an equal footing. Similarly, during the Malla period the Hindu kings also supported Buddhism. However, during the reign of king Jayasthiti Malla, the Hinduisation of Buddhists was implemented, even forcing Buddhist monks to become householders (Locke 1985:449).

After the Gorkhā conquest of Nepal in 1769, the Shah kings intensified the Hinduisation of Nepalese society. Immediately after the conquest, Prithivinarayan Shah, intensified Hindu religious supremacy by announcing his country to be the "True Land of the Hindus" (*Asali Hindustān*).<sup>29</sup> Sharma remarks that "Hindu Orthodoxy in Nepal has strengthened much more after the Shah dynasty of Nepal came to power." (Sharma 1977:2). However, it was only in 1854 that Jangabahadur, the first Rana prime minister, introduced the written law based on Hinduism in Nepal, which subordinated all other ethnic nationalities: the Tāmāng, the Newar, the Gurung, the Sherpā, the Limbu, the Rāi, the Magar, the Thāru etc. and even the Brahmin and Chhetris (Khas), the ruling class of Nepal.

In 1951, the 104 years long Rana rule ended, but Nepal continued to experience domination by the Hindu religion. In 1960, king Mahendra introduced the partyless political system called Panchayat, which proclaimed Nepal as the only "Hindu Kingdom" in the world, thus ignoring its multi-religious, multi-national and multi-lingual composition. It legitimised the Brahmin-Kṣetris to impose Hindu religious supremacy over all other

populations of Nepal. In 1964, with the implementation of the New Legal Code (*Nayām Muluki Ein*), the Hindu caste discrimination lost its legal ground, but this did not diminish Hindu religious domination. The ruling class developed slogans such as “One nation, one language, one religion, and one culture” in favour of the Brahmin-Kṣetri community. The 30 years of the Panchayat regime (1960–90) gave moral and financial support to Hindu religious organisations such as the “World Hindu Council” (*Viśva Hindu Pariṣad*) and strengthened Hindu fundamentalism within Nepal.

In 1990, with the re-introduction of a multi-party political system, Nepal took on a new constitution but retained the name of “Hindu Kingdom”. Political change in 1990, however, provided enough liberty for ethnic non-Hindu religious communities to express their dissatisfaction with the Hinduisation in the country. In the same year, non-Hindu communities in Nepal carried out many mass demonstrations to stop the constitutional declaration of Nepal as a “Hindu Kingdom”. Despite the objections the 1990 constitution did indeed declare Nepal a “Hindu Kingdom”. Finally, in 2006, the reinstated House of Representative issued a proclamation declaring Nepal secular.

One of the controversial aspects of the Newar society is the Hindu-Buddhist distinction. This society has indistinguishably mixed Hindu and Buddhist practices.<sup>30</sup> The Hindu and Buddhist distinction among the lay Newars is indiscernible, but it is a fact that among the high-caste Newars both Śaivism and Vaṣṇavism, which later began to be known as Hinduism, were prevalent already before the Gorkhā conquest of the Kathmandu Valley. However, the majority of Newars follow both Hinduism and Buddhism. There are also Muslim and Christian Newars in Nepal. Muslim Newars have long lived in Kathmandu and they speak Nepalbhasa. The Christian Newars were forced into exile as soon as Prithivinarayan Shah conquered Nepal in 1769. The British government in India gave shelter to the expelled Christian Newars from Nepal, and their descendants still live there.

State patronage of the Hindu religion proved detrimental to the Buddhist priests, who lost status to their Brahmin counterparts. In Sankhu, during the twentieth century, most Śreṣṭhas used the Buddhist Vajrācārya as their priests, but they have gradually turned to the Brahmin priests. Especially the Śreṣṭhas, who in the past had used only Vajrācāryas as their family priests, have begun to turn to Brahmins since the turn of the twentieth century. Actually, Śreṣṭhas can be seen employing both the Brahmin and Vajrācārya priests depending on the ceremony. Rosser noted that the Brahmins gained their clients by taking them away from the Vajrācārya priests (1966:79). From my survey in Sankhu it appeared that

most castes categorised as clean Newar castes “from whose hands drinking water is accepted by all” (*laḥ cale jupim*) do employ Vajrācārya as their family priests. Although the Vajrācārya in Sankhu lost most of their Śreṣṭha clients, they succeed in retaining many other castes as clients. Neither Brahmins nor Vajrācāryas, however, provide any priestly services to “unclean” or “untouchable” castes “from whom water is not accepted” (*laḥ cale majupim*). These castes usually look for priestly services in their own castes, or use the services of their sisters’ husbands as priests. In case of the Nāy caste, the Nāy Gubhāju from Patan performs priestly services for them. It appeared from my research that one Nāy Gubhāju family performs priestly duties to all the Nāy of the Kathmandu Valley and beyond. They identify themselves as Gubhāju or Vajrācārya, but they are not recognised by other Vajrācārya of the Valley. Although they receive the ritual of monastic initiation at a small Buddhist shrine (*caitya*) in the courtyard of their house, Gellner confirms that this is a Taṇḍukār or Khusaḥ family having marriage relations with the Taṇḍukār in Patan (1995:166). Interestingly, all the unclean and untouchable castes call their priest with an honorific title (Gubhāju) used for the Vajrācārya. The Jogi, Doṃ and Dyolā use either their own relatives or one of the members of their own caste as family priests. In the past, their priests used to come from elsewhere, such as from Banepā or Kathmandu. The Dyolā in Sankhu still invite a Dyolā Gubhāju from Kathmandu for their family rituals.

After the conquest of Nepal, more and more Newar people began to turn toward Hinduism. Nowadays, the majority of people in Sankhu define themselves as Hindu. Most people in the town employ both Hindu and Buddhist priests according to the need of a ceremony. Many scholars have noted that the Newars practise both Hindu and Buddhism. Most Newars today are inclined to define religious affiliations according to the services of the priest they employ. The central committee member of *The Great Foundation of Farmers* (Jyāpu Mahāguthi) did not find it appropriate for the Jyāpus, because most of them employ Buddhist Vajrācārya priests for their domestic rituals, while all of them worship both Hindu and Buddhist deities and follow all the feasts and festivals related both the religions.

### ***Guthi*, the socio-religious associations**

The *guthi*, or socio-religious association, is one of the most important components of Newar society. Many are active in carrying out the complex rituals in Newar society. Licchavi inscriptions from the fifth to eighth centuries already refer to *goṣṭhi* (the Sanskrit word from which

*guthi* is derived) carrying out rituals and social work. Many inscriptions from this period describe the tasks and the financial arrangements of *goṣṭhī*. It appears from these that such associations were involved in establishing and maintaining the temples, monasteries, shrines and rituals, but that they were also instruments of development in the fields of water supply, agriculture, settlement and health, as well as providing public entertainment. The Lele inscription is most significant of these, because of its detailed information about several *goṣṭhīs* responsible for managing religious activities related to social welfare and public entertainment (Vajrācārya 1966:3–4 and 1999:84–5). Regmi states that though a “similar development took place at different parts of the world, the *guthi* system of Nepal was not borrowed from elsewhere” (1976:2).

From the Licchavi period until the end of the Malla period (thirteenth to eighteenth century), the *guthi* system flourished in the Kathmandu Valley. From the beginning of the nineteenth century onwards, the *guthi* began to face difficulties, as state policies changed and started rewarding its army and personnel with *guthi* lands. Most socio-religious associations are dependent on endowments of land. In the past, these endowments were made either by wealthy people or by the rulers. However, since the land reforms of 1964, the position of tenants cultivating these lands has considerably improved. Nowadays, they can pay either very little rent, or sometimes nothing at all, without the risk of being expelled from the land. Due to diminishing *guthi* revenues, many of the ritual and social activities that one can see today may not exist in the years to come. In the recent past, some socio-religious associations have already disappeared, though there are many *guthi* that are still functioning.

Many scholars have focused on the value and the meaning of the Newar *guthi* system.<sup>31</sup> Doherty tried to draw a comparison between the Newar *guthi* systems and the *kidus* of the Tibet. Both Newar *guthi* and *kidu* are urban based and provide mutual aid and fellowship in ritual and economic matters to their members, and their membership can be either inherited or achieved. There are differences, however, *kidu* do not look after religious ritual activities, nor do they carry out certain religious feasts and festivals or processions of gods and goddesses or the maintenance of temples and rest places.<sup>32</sup> Merchants’ organisations like guilds (*seṇi*, *śreṇi*) in ancient India are also comparable to Newar *guthi* organisations, though they were restricted to promoting business rather than supporting religious ritual activities (Ray 1986:111–12). One could even expand comparisons to the guilds of medieval European traders and craftsmen, although their formation was mainly based on occupations, and their aims were to improve their products, enhance businesses, train their members and look

after their own welfare. They also were responsible for looking after religious ritual activities, and participated in processions of gods and goddesses. In many instances they were influential in the economic, political and religious lives of European towns for centuries (Israel 1995:119–21).

Apart from their religious and ritual aspects, the philanthropic features of *guthi* are obvious. In Kathmandu there are many *guthi* that assist the poor and the needy with housing, education, training in certain skills, employment, medical expenses or legal assistance. The *guthis* of the Urāy are most useful and functional, especially in Kathmandu.<sup>33</sup> Malla discusses the philanthropic aspects of Newar *guthi* (2000:39–45), but in Sankhu such *guthi* are not found.

*Guthi* can be categorised according to their function. Gellner divided Newar *guthi* into six types: economic *guthi*, public utility *guthi*, caste council *guthi*, lineage deity *guthi*, *guthi* for the worship of a particular deity and funeral *guthi*. He pointed out that the Newar *guthi* rarely constituted economic or cooperative *guthi* (Gellner 1992:236). In Sankhu there are also no economic *guthi*. Although such *guthi* did exist among the Sāyami caste, they disappeared after they abandoned their traditional oil-pressing mill. Except for a few *guthi* related to rest places, there are very few *guthi* that can be considered public utility *guthi*.

*Sī guthi*, which determines a person's social identity, are the most important *guthi* in Newar society. In the Newar language, *sī* means death and *guthi* means an association or trust. Therefore, the associations related to death began to be called *sī guthi*. These associations, which may have other functions as well, are typical for Newar society and are caste-bound groups. Their main function is the carrying out funeral processions when a death occurs in the house of one of its members. *Sī guthi* and *sanā guthi* can be of a different nature in different places and communities. Every family must become a member of one of the *sī guthi*, not only because it is a matter of social prestige, but also due to the important role they play when family members die. These caste-bound funeral associations can be considered to reflect fundamental aspects of Newar social life. One of the reasons for the prevailing caste divisions among Newar society are the *sī guthi*, the funeral associations based on castes. They are therefore very important in Newar society.

Most socio-religious associations are dependent on endowments of land cultivated by tenants. As has been stated above, since the land reforms of 1964 in Nepal the position of tenants, at least in Kathmandu Valley, has greatly improved. Nowadays, they can pay either very little rent (*kut*)<sup>34</sup> or sometimes nothing at all, without risking to be expelled

from the land. Not all Newar *guthi* are dependent on land endowments only. There are also several that have no land at their disposal, and which are run by volunteer members. *Sī guthi*, especially, are run by volunteer members in most cases; by contrast, other *guthi* are mainly dependent on land endowments. In the past, these endowments were made either by religiously minded rich individuals or by the rulers (Amatya 1987:97).

Endowments made by the members of ruling families are called *rāj guthi* and those made by individuals are termed *duniyā* (public) *guthi* (Regmi 1976:58–60). Before the Guthi Corporation (*Guthi Samsthān*) was introduced in 1964, His Majesty's Government (HMG) *Guthi* Administrative Office (*Sri 5 ko Sarkār Guthi Bandovasta Addā*) used to look after the state-owned *guthis* in Nepal. The Guthi Corporation is an autonomous body that is responsible for managing and controlling royal (*rāj*) *guthi*.<sup>35</sup> Later, it also managed any public (*duniyā*) *guthi*, if the majority of its members made a request that it do so. District branches of the Guthi Corporation are found in almost all seventy-five districts of Nepal. They look after *guthi*-related tasks in their areas, i.e. towns and VDCs within the district. Therefore, in a town like Sankhu or a small village like Cāmgu, people have to go to their district headquarters to contact the Guthi Corporation. Following the Licchavi tradition, the Guthi Corporation regulation of 1976 defines a *guthi* as an endowment for the performance of any regular or ceremonial religious function or festival of any deity, or for the construction or maintenance or operation of temples, rest houses, roadside shelters, wells, tanks, ponds, waterspouts, arrangement for the supply of drinking water, roads, bathing river banks (*ghāts*), bridges, tree shelters, libraries, schools, dispensaries, hospitals, buildings or any other institutions (Regmi 1985a:2 and Paudyal 1987:7). The definition retains the aspect of development that has been characteristic of *guthi* since Licchavi times, but its efforts are now limited to ritual functions. The present government no longer uses the existing *guthi* structure as an instrument of development and maintenance of the city.

The Guthi Corporation took up the task of handling the financial management of major festivals and temples throughout the country. However, it lost credibility with the people because of the inappropriate support it provided to religiously important institutions. Especially in the Kathmandu Valley, it gained a bad reputation because of the role it has played in suppressing traditional feasts and festivals by not providing sufficient financial assistance. According to a report, there are 2,082 *guthi* under the Guthi Corporation.<sup>36</sup> The inefficient management of the Guthi Corporation is the main cause for the disappearance of many festivals in Nepal. The revenue goes to the Guthi Corporation, but the responsibilities

of maintaining *guthi* functions go to members of *guthi* without funding, who by faith or religious feelings cannot escape from their traditional duties.

In Sankhu, there are many ritual activities that are dependent on financial support from the Guthi Corporation. In many cases, the institution has appointed so-called contractors (*thekedār*) to organise certain rituals or other activities.

During the Vajrayoginī festival, this contractor organises many acts of worship and sacrifices and he had to take care of the maintenance of palanquins. He told me that this task was tedious, because the Guthi Corporation never provided him with enough money at the necessary time, and the money he received was less than he spent. Many times he had to fulfill his duties under difficult circumstances. Similarly, another contractor, who used to be responsible for the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival, abandoned his duties because of the harassment he had to face from the Guthi Corporation when it paid back the expenses.

### **Newar settlements**

Newar settlements are significantly different from those of other communities in the country. In the Kathmandu Valley, and beyond, most of them are basically similar in appearance. The Newars have always built their cities, towns and villages in a compact way. Building houses together, sharing a single wall between them, is common among the Newars. Their settlements have always been of an urban nature.<sup>37</sup> Even the smallest Newar settlements exhibit basic urban characteristics. Giovanni Scheibler finds Newar town planning has typical features that he considers a great cultural achievement (Scheibler 1988:7, see also Korn 1977:2–10).

Specific castes are usually grouped together. Traditionally, the central area of Newar cities, towns, and villages are reserved for high-caste Newars, while the edge or the outer rim of the cities, towns and villages is reserved for the so-called low castes, considered “impure,” “unclean” or “untouchable”. The mixing of different castes in the same locality has taken place for a few decades, but the traditional structure still is predominant in all the cities and in the smaller settlements.





was applied to the whole country and was called *Nepālamaṇḍala*.<sup>38</sup> Gutschow and Bajracharya (1977:3) present three layers of *mandala* for the Kathmandu Valley, while Gutschow and Kölver (1975) present such a model for Bhaktapur. Zanen asserts that the configuration of the town of Sankhu has several symbolic components of a *mandala* (Zanen 1986:148–50). The *mandala* model is imagined for every Newar town and cities in the valley. Gellner found the basic concept of the *mandala* model Zanen presented for Sankhu was applicable to Lalitpur (Gellner 1992:48). Here I reproduce the cosmic figure of *mandala* Zanen presented for Sankhu (Map 2).

According to Vāstu Vidyā, a walled fortification is one of the necessary components of towns and cities in ancient times.<sup>39</sup> The fortification of towns and villages in the Nepal Valley was already prominent in the Licchavi period, and this tradition continued till the fall of Malla rule in 1769 (Korn 1977:12–16). One of the features of such a fort was to have a wall around it. After the 1769 Gorkhā conquest of Nepal, any wall around the town must have lost its significance, as it had stopped being a fort.

### **Newar arts and architecture**

Excavations and inscriptional sources confirm that during the Licchavi period there were already highly sophisticated settlements, art and architecture in Nepal (Tiwari 2001). Although there are no buildings traceable from the Licchavi period, scholars believe that in later periods Nepalese rulers and people continued the traditions established by the Licchavis. The eye-catching art and architecture that survives till today in Nepal is mostly dated from the Malla period. Some has survived the two major earthquakes in 1833 and 1934 that destroyed most buildings. Wright provides a record of destruction in the Kathmandu Valley during the 1833 earthquake.<sup>40</sup> Most of the buildings destroyed, especially public structures such as temples and rest places, were reconstructed, in many cases in their original form, though in many instances they lost their original shapes, and sometimes they simply disappeared altogether. This corpus of religious monuments, pagoda style temples, stupas, god houses, public buildings and rest places is known as Newar art and architecture, and is famous for its artistic beauty and peculiarity throughout Asia and beyond.

However, the replacement of traditional buildings with modern architecture has become more popular since the later half of the last century. W. Korn noted, “As long as there were no Western influences the building style followed the traditional pattern. With the massive influx of Western ideas at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century a

total change in the design of dwellings took place.” He also noted, “The break with tradition was so abrupt and harsh that over the last few years a positive trend has emerged to find a ‘modern Nepali style’ and at least building materials, such as brick, tile, stone and wood are again being used in many places like before.” (Korn 1977:19).



Plate 2: A traditionally carved window in Sankhu (1997).

To attach carved windows and doors to a house used to be one of the elegant elements of Newar house building. Throughout the Kathmandu Valley and beyond the Valley, in all Newar settlements, traditional houses are garnished with such windows and doors. Especially temples, god houses and rest places were adorned with carved windows and doors (Banerjee 1980, Deo 1968). Most individual houses built before the middle of the twentieth century were also garnished with carved windows and doors. Therefore, carved windows and doors are still to be seen in all Newar settlements. However, because of the popularity of Western style buildings, people have virtually stopped adding traditionally carved windows and doors to their houses. They leave out these ornaments also because of the high costs involved in the procurement of carved wooden windows and doors.

However, recently some interest in traditional architecture has revived in Nepal. In all the three main cities of the Kathmandu Valley –

Bhaktapur, Patan and Kathmandu – the local governments (municipalities) again support rebuilding public places in traditional Newar style. Many wealthy individuals are also building their houses in Newar style. In tourist business sectors, such as hotel buildings and restaurants, Newar architecture has become popular. The production and selling of Newar style sculptures, crafts and arts has also become a rewarding business in Nepal.

## Newar Culture and Tradition

Today, Newars are highly organised when it comes to ritual activities. Not only in Kathmandu, but also wherever Newars have moved and settled, they have managed to observe the regular feasts and festivals, rituals and traditions. Almost every month they observe one or another festival, feast, fast or procession of gods and goddesses. One common feature of all the Newar cities, towns and villages is that each of them has its specific annual festival and procession (*jātrā*) of the most important deity of that particular place. The processions of different mother goddesses during Pahāṃcarhe in March or April and Indra jātrā in August or September in Kathmandu, and the processions of Rāto Macchendranāth in Patan and Bisket Jātrā in Bhaktapur are such annual festivals. In the case of Sankhu, the festival and procession of the goddess Vajrayoginī is the most important for the people of the town.

The masked dances of various deities are another important feature of Newar society. There are several that are performed at different times of the year in the Valley. Among these are the Devī dances performed around the Yamyā festival in Kathmandu. The yearly Devī dances (*pyākham*) in Sankhu are performed eight days before the full-moon of Yamlā. All these feasts and fasts, festivals and processions of gods and goddesses, rituals and traditions of the Kathmandu Valley are characteristic for Newar culture.

Scholars agree that the numerous feasts, fasts, festivals and procession of gods and goddesses celebrated in present day Nepal are mostly continuations from the Malla period, and that some of them even go back to the Thakuri and Licchavi periods. Analysing some names of festivals found in the Gopālarājavamśāvalī, the oldest chronicle of Nepal, and an inscription dated AD 1441 (NS 561), Sharma (1997:153–4) stresses that Newar festivals had developed their present shape already around the reigns of Jayasthiti Malla (AD 1382–95) and Yaksha Malla (AD 1428–1482).<sup>41</sup> Even after the 1769 Gorkhā conquest of Nepal, the Gorkhā rulers accepted most of Newar culture as their court culture (Van den Hoek

1990). This helped a great deal in the continuation of Newar culture and its rituals in modern Nepal.

### **Newar food culture and ritual**

Newar society has a rich food culture also. The Newar kitchen is famous for having a large variety of foods, including both vegetable and meat dishes.<sup>42</sup> Feasts with special foods are an important part of any Newar festival. It is customary to eat a certain kind of food on a special moment or day of a certain festival. Lavish eating and drinking during all major festivals is an essential part of Newar social life. During these festivals, married daughters, their husbands and children are invited to a feast in the parental homes. To invite all relatives and neighbours for the feasts during any big festival is also customary.

Mohanī can be considered the most lavish annual festival of the Newars. During the procession and festival of the main deity of a particular city, town or village, people of that area consume plenty of food and drink. In this regard, the festival and the procession of Vajrayoginī can be considered the second biggest festival for people in Sankhu after the Mohanī. Next in scale would be Svanti, followed by other annual and seasonal festivals such as Yomari punhi, Ghycākusalhu, Māmyākhvāḥ svayegu, Digu pūjā, Gathām̐mugaḥcarhe, Gumphuni, Bauyākhvāḥ svayegu, Cathā etc.

Similarly, during each of the life-cycle rituals performed for boys and girls, the Newars observe feast meals for their relatives and friends. Performance of life-cycle rituals begins as soon as a child is born. First is birth purification (*macābu byamkegu*), when a child turns four to ten days old, which is followed by the name-giving ceremony, the rice feeding, the handing over of loincloth in the case of boys, the performance of *ihī*, the ritual marriage and *bārḥātayegu*, the twelve days' confinements in a dark room of a girl. Rituals performed during marriage are very important in a person's life. An old-age ceremony called *jamko* is observed for those who reach seventy-seven years, seven month and seven days. The Jamko ceremony is repeated when one reaches the ages of 83, 88, 99 and 108, but in slightly different manners. During each of these life-cycle rituals, specific varieties of food are prepared and feast meals are eaten. Although the main course of food served during every occasion is similar, there is particular food to be served on the particular occasion. Similarly, offering foods and drinks to various gods and goddesses, deceased people, ghost and spirits are also done, but in each case in a different way.

## CHAPTER FOUR

# THE TOWN OF SANKHU: HISTORY AND MYTH

### Introduction

The creation of Sankhu is attributed to the goddess Vajrayoginī. In this chapter, I will first consider the name of the town. I will then discuss the legend of Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna (MM), which is the only myth providing a detailed account of the origin of the goddess Vajrayoginī and the town of Sankhu. I will also deal with the history of the town, attempting to present all the available material related to Sankhu. The chronicles and inscriptions are the major sources of its history, and I will discuss both the published and the unpublished resources related to Sankhu and Vajrayoginī in order to provide a historical insight into the town and the temple of the goddess.

### Name of the town

Sankhu has three popular names: Sakva, Sankhu (Sāṃkhu) and Saṃkharāpur. Newar speakers use the first name and Khas-Nepali speakers use the second, while the third name is rarely used. People in Sankhu believe that because the town is situated below (*kvay*) Tibet (*Samde*) it was called Sakvade (“the country situated below Tibet”<sup>1</sup>). Those who support this idea believe that Sakva is an indigenous name and that Sankhu is a new name given by the Khas speakers. However, there are many others, including some linguists, who are of the opinion that the word “Sankhu” is indigenous. Sankhu lies between two rivers: to the east is the river Sālinakhu and to the west is the Asakhu. It is likely that people called the town Sankhu after the name of the river, “Sālinakhu”. The word “*khu*” or “*khusi*” still means “river” in the Newar language. There are several other places in the valley that take their names from the rivers flowing nearby, such as Nakhu, Bhacākhu, Balakhu, Tukhu and Hijākhu. Some people claim that the legendary king Śaṅkaradeva or Śaṃkhadeva

built Sankhu and called the town “Śaṃkharāpur” or “Śaṃkhapur” (the country of Śaṅkaradeva). This name later changed to Sāṃkhu, (Sankhu), Sākva or Sakva. It is believed that Śaṅkharāpur is a Sanskrit name and may have been attributed to the town later. Replacing indigenous place names with Sanskrit names is still practised in Nepal.<sup>2</sup>

The Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna (MM) is one of the most popular mythical stories about Sankhu. It is the tale of its creation of the town and of the festival of Vajrayoginī. It also contains the story of the Buddha reborn as king Maṇicūḍa. In this story Maṇicūḍa is presented as the son of a king Brahmadaṭṭa and Queen Kāntimatī that used to live in a city called Śāketu, south of Jambudvīpa. Whether the town named Śāketu was Sankhu itself, or a town situated in India by the name of Śāketa (Ayodhyā) has to be verified. It was common in countries from Sri Lanka to Thailand to name towns after famous cities such as Ayodhyā. It is, therefore, possible that religious people changed the name of Śāketu to Sāṃkhu. The Svayambhū Purāṇa is another legend that is very popular among Newar Buddhists of Nepal. One of its versions narrates that once there was a city called Śāketu in the Valley of Nepal.<sup>3</sup> However, there is no evidence to conclude that the present day Sankhu was once known as Śāketu.

The third legend, the Svasthānī, identifies Sankhu as Lāvanya *desa*, the kingdom of a Brahmin king Navarāja and Queen Candrāvatī. The Svasthānī is a Hindu myth of Nepalese origin, and contains the story of a Brahmin boy Navarāja being crowned as a king of Lāvanya *desa*, presumably the present day Sankhu situated on the bank of the river Śālinadī. He was made king because of his mother, who gained merit from the month-long observance (*vrata*) of the Svasthānī. This *vrata* is still observed once every year in Sankhu on the bank of Śālinadī. Therefore, religious Hindus believe that Sankhu itself was the Lāvanya *desa*, the kingdom of Navarāja. Two stones situated on the south-east bank of the Śālinadī River are believed to represent King Navarāj and his Queen Candrāvatī, and people worship them during the Svasthānī *vrata*. No other evidence has been found to identify Sankhu with the kingdom of Navarāj, Lāvanya *desa*. Neither is the name Lāvanya *desa* common among the people of Sankhu. So far, the oldest text containing the Svasthānī legend in Sanskrit is dated to AD 1573.<sup>4</sup> The first known Newar version appeared in AD 1603.<sup>5</sup>

### **The origin of Sankhu and the legend of Maṇisāila Mahāvadāna**

A legend tells that the Sankhu Valley was once a lake that the goddess Vajrayoginī herself drained by cleaving the surrounding mountains with her sword. A similar legend exists concerning the creation of the Kathmandu Valley by the Bodhisattva Mañjuśrī.<sup>6</sup> In his article “The Goddess Vajrayoginī and the kingdom of Sankhu (Nepal)”, Sj. M. Zanen compares two Buddhist legends, the Svayambhū Purāṇa and the Maṇisāila Mahāvadāna. The first extensively describes the creation of Nepal, the greater Kathmandu Valley, by Mañjuśrī, who cleaved the mountain of Cobhār to discharge the water of the lake covering the Kathmandu Valley; the latter describes the creation of the Sankhu Valley by the goddess Vajrayoginī, who cleaved the gorge in between Cāṃgu and Kāgeśvarī hills to create the Valley of Sankhu (Zanen 1986:126–32). He shows similarities between Mañjuśrī, the god of knowledge, and the goddess Vajrayoginī. Zanen argues that the story about the creation of the Sankhu valley is in certain respects a variant of the account of the creation of the greater valley of Nepal. He concludes that the goddess Maṇiyoginī mentioned in the Svayambhū Purāṇa is none other than Vajrayoginī herself (1986:130–1).



Plate 3: A view of Sankhu from the east. In the background is the Kathmandu Valley (October 1991).

Maṇisāila Mahāvadāna (MM) is a legend of the Buddha reborn as Maṇicūḍa, the king with a jewel in his head, which he gives away as a gift (*dāna*). But the MM also deals with the creation of the kingdom of

Sankhu. This story is in the Newar language, but mixed with many songs of adulation in Sanskrit. It has many versions, of which Barnavajra Vajrācārya printed one, in two volumes, in 1962 and 1963.<sup>7</sup> In total, it contains thirteen chapters. Barnavajra Vajrācārya does not mention any definite source to the manuscript. Whether Barnavajra later inserted the creation story of Sankhu and the elaborate story of the goddess Vajrayoginī into the text of Maṇicuḍāvadāna, or whether his original manuscript contained both stories is still unknown. My endeavour to obtain the original manuscript of the MM has not yet been successful.

Recently, I have obtained a few incomplete handwritten chronicles of Sankhu and Vajrayoginī from the Vajrācārya priest of Sankhu. One of them includes the story of the coming into being of the goddess Vajrayoginī. This manuscript also contains some chronicles related to Sankhu and Vajrayoginī. It has sixty-one pages: the first fourteen are related to the origin of Vajrayoginī and the creation of Sankhu; the last nine comprise a ritual manual for the Vajrayoginī festival. The rest of the manuscript mainly contains chronicles related to Vajrayoginī. It is written in Devanāgarī script, but its final pages are missing. So when and by whom it was copied is not known, though it cannot be a very old text, as it is written in Devanāgarī. Together with the origin of Vajrayoginī and the creation story of Saṃkharāpur (Sankhu), it contains some historical notes related to Vajrayoginī. On page 18, a first note appears with a date about the family separation of a priest called Jitārīdeva, which is dated AD 1725 (NS 845). Then, on pages 20–52, several historical notes are recorded systematically, covering a period from 1516–1699 (NS 636–819). This manuscript does not contain the story of Maṇicuḍa. For our present purposes, I shall call this chronicle Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna Copy (MMC). During my second fieldwork in 2000, I obtained an identical version of MMC from a Vajrācārya priest, which we shall name Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna Copy-I (MMC-I). It is written in Devanāgarī on yellow-coated Nepali paper. It is a complete manuscript with 27 folios and is written on both sides. The final page of this manuscript mentions that a scribe called Aṣṭamānada borrowed the original text from Harṣamānanda and finished copying it on the day of full-moon in the month of Māgha in the year 1944 (NS 1064). Apart from some new information on its last pages, such as the story of the writing of MMC-I, it resembles the MMC that describes the origin of the goddess Vajrayoginī, the creation of the town of Sankhu, the first festival of Vajrayoginī, a genealogy of the Vajrācārya (folios 1–8), chronicles related to Vajrayoginī (folios 8–18) and ritual instruction for the festival of Vajrayoginī (folios 18–20). The ritual instructions on the Vasundharā procession and Pañjārām festival (folio 21a–b) are complete



in MMC-I. The scribe Aṣṭamānanda's own note about the copying of the text appears first on folio 22a, which is followed by a note of an offering made to Vajrayoginī dated 1879 (NS 999). Then, he has added the history and hearsay story about the erection of the Bhimsen temple at Śālinādī by Ranadeva Ācāla and Hariṣaṃkha Bhāro of Sankhu in 1679 (NS 799) and its restoration in 1862 (NS 982). It also contains ritual instructions for carrying out the repainting of the goddess Vajrayoginī, including services to be performed by various castes of the town during its repainting (folios 23b–26b). The final page of the text gives instructions to priests to perform the *pūraśācarana* ritual at the temple (see MMC and MMC-I).

The next chronicle obtained from the Vajrācārya priest includes a short account of the creation story of Sankhu together with the ritual instructions for visiting nine ponds, nine caves and nine monasteries (Vihāra) around the Vajrayoginī temple. This manuscript MG (Manuscript Gumbāhāḥ) is written in the Newar script, and the language is a mixture of Sanskrit and Newar. It has fifteen pages, including a four-page long genealogy of the Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu. It says that in 1528 (NS 648) two Vajrācārya brothers, Jaydeva and Jñānadeva from Gumbāhāla, moved to Sankhu from the temple sanctuary of Vajrayoginī. Its last two pages are notes related to the renovation of the Vajrayoginī statue. The final note, dated 1801 (NS 921) tells that the body of the Ekjaṭī (Mhāsukhvāḥ Māju) statue was entirely gilded with pure gold.

There are many versions of the Maṇicūḍāvadāna that contain the story of Maṇicūḍa but do not mention Sankhu and Vajrayoginī. S. Lienhard (1963) has translated one Newar version of the *avadāna* that does contain the story of Maṇicūḍa. His translation is based on an undated Newar manuscript in Devanāgarī script, which he dates back to the middle of the nineteenth century. He presents the transliteration of the main text and an English translation of it. This text does not connect Maṇicūḍa's story with Vajrayoginī, in contrast with our MM. R. Handurukande has made a comparative study of seven versions of the Maṇicūḍāvadāna as well as of a comparable section from the Svayambhū Purāṇa, all written in Buddhist Hybrid Sanskrit, and a Tibetan drama on the same theme. Among the seven manuscripts he studied, one was dated AD 1793, the others were not dated at all.<sup>8</sup> The fourth chapter of the Svayambhū Purāṇa presented by Handurukande relates the story of Maṇicūḍa with Ugratārā or Vajrayoginī. In this chapter, significantly, the Svayambhū Purāṇa predicts that the area of Sankhu, through the power of Ugratārā, will become a second Nepal (Handurukande 1967:xli and 180). The Svayambhū Purāṇa of which I have a copy contains the story of Maṇicūḍa giving away his crest jewel, but this story is not related to Vajrayoginī.

Besides the unpublished MMC and MMC-1 manuscripts, the MM is the only text we know of that provides the mythical account of the town of Sankhu coming into being and of its most important goddess Vajrayoginī. The MMC and the MM both present identical stories about the coming into being of the goddess Vajrayoginī and the creation of the town. The MMC and MMC-1, however, present these stories in a shorter version, while the MM recounts them in detail. My summary of these stories is based on the MM.

Once upon a time there was a king named Aśoka in the heavenly place Pāṭaliputra Paṭanā.<sup>9</sup> He was a great devotee of the three jewels (*triratna*),<sup>10</sup> and he was a very generous dispenser of gifts. One day, he went to the Kukuṭārāma monastery (*viḥāra*) with his teachers, priests, ministers and attendants to hear the story of Ugratārā Vajrayoginī<sup>11</sup> from the Buddhist monk (*bhikṣu*) Upagupta, who had heard it from the Great Maitribodhisatva Śākyamunī (the Buddha), who had told the story to a big gathering at the Padmamālā monastery situated above Sankhu at the Maṇicūḍa Mountain close to the Himalayas (Vajrācārya 1962: 3). The story he heard went as follows.

In the Satyayuga, the Golden Age (the mythical time when human beings and gods and goddesses were able to communicate with each other) and when the life span of human beings amounted to 80,000 years (Vajrācārya 1962:8), in the place called Nepal, there was a mountain called Maṇicūḍa that was a mine of jewels, covered by beautiful flowers, fruit trees and wild animals. Right at the centre of the mountain was a “jewel stone” called Maṇiśaila. One day, the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī emanated from the inside of that stone in the form of a very bright light.

Many years later, when the life span of human beings amounted to 70,000 years, there was a big lake in the Nepal Valley in which divine serpents (*nāga*) lived. To the north of that lake, on the Maṇicūḍa Mountain, the bright light of Vajrayoginī had become very famous under the name of Ugratārā (Fearsome Goddess) (Vajrācārya 1962:9).

Later, when the human life time was 60,000 years, Vajrayoginī took a definite shape with three faces: the central face red, the right face blue and the left face white, each face having three eyes. Her right hand held a sword and her left hand held a blue lotus (*uphoṣvām*). She had a smiling face and she looked beautiful, like a twelve-year old girl with all the auspicious signs. She showed compassion to every creature in the world, gods, human beings and demons alike, and was ready to liberate them from their sorrows. As soon as she took her form the world trembled. Gods and goddesses, men and demons and all other creatures worshipped her with happiness (Vajrācārya 1962:12).

To the left of the Ugratārā Vajrayoginī, a Buddhist relic by the name of Jogeśvara Maṇi Caitya, which would become very famous in the Kaliyuga (Kali age),<sup>12</sup> emerged in the form of a jewel stone (*maṇiśilā*).

Akṣobhyatathāgata (one form of the Buddha) emanated just in front of Vajrayoginī in the form of Vāsuki Nāga, a divine serpent. Then, about two hundred metres below Vajrayoginī, Mahākāla Kṣetrapāla appeared in the form of a triangular stone.<sup>13</sup> Soon after his appearance, gods, demons, men, *yakṣa* and monsters started to worship him.

At that time, a saint named Yogajñācārya lived in a cave called Siddhaguphā and worshiped Vajrayoginī every day. One day, Vajrayoginī appeared in front of him and inquired if he wanted any boon from her. Overwhelmed by her appearance, he replied that he would accept whatever she bestowed upon him. That answer made her happy and she told him that from that day onwards he should become her priest with the task of worshipping her every day. She also granted that task to his descendants and foretold to him that she would remain there as long as his descendants remained. Then he praised her with a long song, which made her even happier. She gave him a new name, Vācāsiddhi or “one whose words are perfect”. From that day onwards, he became the priest of Vajrayoginī (Vajrācārya 1962:18).

The third Chapter of the MM presents an elaborate description of Vācāsiddhi’s marriage with Jñānabatī, the daughter of Ācārya Vikramaśīla, who used to live in the place called Mañjupattana that had been created by Mañjuśrī. Some years after their marriage, they begot a son, Jotideva Ācārya, to whom Vācāsiddhi taught all the directives for the worship of Vajrayoginī (Vajrācārya 1962:20–30). Jotideva took over Vācāsiddhi’s task of worshipping the goddess. One day, Vācāsiddhi and his wife both decided to end their lives and they began to worship and pray to the goddess Vajrayoginī to allow them to merge with her body. They recited many hymns to please the goddess. At last, the goddess Vajrayoginī produced a mystic flame from her body in which eventually both Vācāsiddhi and his wife disappeared. When the flame extinguished, only the goddess Vajrayoginī remained. In this way the couple merged into the body of the goddess. Their son Jotideva, who saw this, cried with joy. He continued to worship the goddess until his death, after which his descendants took over his task.<sup>14</sup> The account of the appearance of Vajrayoginī ends here.

The fourth chapter of the book describes the processes of worshipping Vajrayoginī and the merits one obtains by worshipping her (Vajrācārya 1962:32–8).

Chapter five of the book tells the story of the suffering of the gods and goddesses caused by the demon Māyāsur, and the killing of Māyāsur. This chapter aims to show the great power of Vajrayoginī, which compelled the god Viṣṇu to worship her. The story runs as follows:

Once upon a time, a powerful demon called Māyāsūr harassed gods and goddesses, including Indra, and chased them away from Heaven. This forced Indra and the other deities to seek Lord Viṣṇu's assistance to fight with the demon. On their request, Lord Viṣṇu went to fight Māyāsūr, but in vain. Māyāsūr killed numerous gods and goddesses and trapped Viṣṇu with the help of a charm. Viṣṇu found himself powerless and had to flee and hide in the Sumeru Mountain. As he began to meditate, he remembered the powerful goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī and decided to seek her help. He went towards Mañicūḍa Mountain, where the goddess Vajrayoginī lived, to request her to fight with the demon Māyāsūr. As he arrived close to the gate of the goddess, he saw her guard, Mahākāla Bhairava. The nervous Viṣṇu requested him to kill the demon Māyāsūr. To that end, Mahākāla Bhairava explained that Viṣṇu should take a bath in the twelve confluences (*tīrtha*)<sup>15</sup> around the Mañicūḍa Mountain in order to get a chance to see Vajrayoginī. Viṣṇu followed Mahākāla Bhairava's instructions and took a bath in all the twelve confluences. This pleased Vajrayoginī very much and she advised him to learn the Dhāraṇī mantra<sup>16</sup> from the Buddha Śākyasiṃha. He followed Vajrayoginī's instructions, and as soon as he began to recite the mantra Dhāraṇī, the omnipotent goddess Mahāmāyā Vijaybāhinī Devī<sup>17</sup> emerged. She had a thousand hands and four faces with different colours: red, blue, white and yellow. Each face had three eyes. She assured Viṣṇu that she would help him defeat the demon Māyāsūr. When Viṣṇu and his fellow gods and goddesses faced Māyāsūr in the battlefield again, this time with the help of the goddess Mahāmāyā Vijaybāhinī Devī, they succeeded in killing Māyāsūr and his troupe.

Showing Viṣṇu, the almighty Hindu god, as subordinate to the Buddha Śākyamuni, Vajrayoginī and Mahāmāyā Vijaybāhinī Devī, the MM tries to show the power of the Buddhist gods and goddesses to the Nepalese people. The intricate mixture of Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses in one story is the most interesting part of this book. Such stories have their roots in Newar society. The Newars combine both Hindu and Buddhist gods and goddesses in their pantheon inseparably to this day.

The following chapters (six and seven) of the book tell the story of a woman who was salvaged from her sins after taking bath in eleven of these twelve confluences (Vajrācārya 1962:63–72). During her next life, on her way to her parents' home, she arrived at the twelfth confluence. As she was very tired after walking a long distance she took rest and fell asleep. As she was sleeping, she fell down from the hill near the confluence. Her daughter saw her dying, and took some water from the confluence and poured it into her mouth. This assured her life in heaven. At the moment of her cremation, people heard a forecast from above that in the beginning of Kaliyuga, the age of destruction, a king named

Śaṃkhadeva would be born, the kingdom of Śaṃkhaṇḍa (‘‘Conch-shaped town’’, another name of Sankhu) would be created and the festival of Vajrayoginī would take place in the town of Śaṃkhaṇḍa (Vajracārya 1962:6–8).

The eighth chapter of the book (Vajracārya 1962:9–35) describes the birth of Śaṃkhadeva and the creation of Śaṃkhaṇḍa:

In 3300 BCE (1801 of the Kali era), when Vajrayoginī was playing in the Forest of Maṇicūḍa Mountain, she dropped her ornament called *nāgakuṇḍala*. As soon as it touched the ground, water sprang from that place, and a lake was formed, which she named Maṇikuṇḍa. Then she went to another part of the forest called Dathumalā, where she sowed a medicinal seed called *rājautpanna* below a tree. The tree gave birth to a beautiful child with all the auspicious signs. She informed her priest of this and asked him to bring the child home. She named him Śaṃkhadeva and blessed him to be the king.

As Śaṃkhadeva grew up, the priest Jogdeva, a descendent of Vācāsiddhi, gave him all the necessary education. Then, one day, the goddess Vajrayoginī told the priest to create a kingdom and to make Śaṃkhadeva its king. The priest built a kingdom in the shape of a conch shell, bringing seven villages (*grāma*) together. They were: Nāgācā, Gulimā, Sāsaṃ, Gāgal, Pāvanā, Gudekhvāḥ and Cvabāhāḥ.<sup>18</sup> According to Vajrayoginī’s wish, he made eight quarters in the town: Dhomlā, Sālkhā, Calākhū, Dongāhiti, Svamtvā, Ilampā, Imlā and Pukulāchi. The town was also surrounded by water. A palace was built in the centre of the town and nine monasteries (*bāhāḥ*) were erected.<sup>19</sup>

Jogdev created eight shrines of the mother goddesses (*aṣṭamātrkā pīṭha*) inside the town and eight outside. These shrines of the mother goddesses (*pīṭha*) still exist in the places mentioned in the MM.<sup>20</sup> Occasional worship at these shrines (*pīṭha pūjā*) did take place. In 1979 I had chance attending the worship at these shrines. Hundreds of people from the town participated in this *pīṭha pūjā*.

According to the MM, four gates were built: one for carrying away dead bodies, one for giving away daughters in marriage, one for bringing brides into the town and one for carrying Vajrayoginī to town during her festival. They are called Sālkhādhvākā, Sāṃgādhvākā, Bhaudhvākā and Dhomlādhvākā. The people of Sankhu still use these gates for their designated purposes.

On the mountain of Maṇicūḍa, nine holy ponds (*kuṇḍa*) were created. Some religious people in Sankhu still visit these ponds (*kuṇḍa*) once every year on the day of Sāpāru (the day of the cow procession to commemorate the dead who passed away that year).<sup>21</sup> Also nine caves (*pāko* or *pāku*)

were created around the mountain. The MM presents these caves as “Mahāvihāra” (great monastery).<sup>22</sup> The people of Sankhu also visit these monasteries on the day of Sāpāru, the first day of the dark half of the Guṃlā month. These rock caves are each approximately  $3 \times 4$  m. Three are located within fifty metres (to the west) of the temple of Vajrayoginī.

Twelve confluences were also created around the town. Religious people in Sankhu still know the location of these confluences and visit them occasionally. In Kathmandu, too, people visit twelve confluences on various occasions. Visiting the twelve confluences is a religious observance for the Newar population in the Kathmandu Valley.

As soon as the construction of the town was completed, along with all these religious symbols, Śaṃkhadev was crowned king of Śaṃkhaṇḍapur and he initiated the festival of the goddess Vasundharā. One day in 1818 of the Kaligata era, Vajrayoginī asked the priest Jogadeva to start her festival too. She told him to make a golden statue of her, which she would name Ekajaṭī Buddhimātā.<sup>23</sup> The goddess Vajrayoginī also told him to make movable stupa or *caitya*, a Buddhist image (more popularly known as *cibhā* in Newar), and of the Siṃhinī (lion-faced guardian) and Byāghrinī (tiger-faced guardian). From that year onwards, the festival of Vajrayoginī takes those statues down below to the town (Vajracharya 1963:6–26).

After the creation of the town and the festival, the story in the book shifts to the merits of taking a bath in the nine ponds in the mountain of Maṇicūḍa. It then shifts to the rebirth of the Buddha as King Maṇicūḍa. The life story of Maṇicūḍa is MM’s second major narrative (Vajracharya 1963:26–162). Since our purpose here is to deal only with Sankhu and the goddess Vajrayoginī, Maṇicūḍa’s story will not be repeated.<sup>24</sup>

## The history of the town

Little documentation of the early history of Sankhu has been discovered. According to MM, the first priest of the goddess Vajrayoginī, Vācāsiddhi, built Sankhu in 1801 Kaligata era, which would equate to 3300 hundred years ago. However, it is difficult to fix historically exactly when the town came into being. Besides the legendary story of MM, we have no evidence about the founding of the town. There have, as yet, been no archaeological excavations in Sankhu to provide firmer data about its early history. Four Buddhist *caityas* were found in Sankhu: two in the Dhomaḷā quarter and two in the Calākhu quarter. They have empty niches, and are believed to date from the Licchavi period (AD 185–879).<sup>25</sup> Zanen believes that the origin of the town of Sankhu lies somewhere in the seventh century AD, after a trade route was opened from Kathmandu through Sankhu to Kutī,

Sigatse and Lhasa in Tibet (1986:125).<sup>26</sup> Only a few Licchavi inscriptions exist to testify to its antiquity. So far as written history is concerned, a sixth century inscription of king Vāmanadeva of AD 538 (Samvat 460) is the oldest evidence relating to the founding of the town:

Om Svasti Samvat 460 Jyeṣṭha śukla 8 Bhaṭṭāraka Mahārājā  
Vāmanadeva enjoying a reign of one hundred years it is hereby informed  
that the following lands have been specified as Lord Vāmana's.

In Lendu area bhūmi 100 and piṇḍaka mā 50 ... in Subrunkuo area  
bhūmi 40 piṇḍaka mā 26, in Śatammi bhūmi 10 piṇḍaka mā 4, in Gamma  
bhūmi 10 piṇḍaka mā 4, *Minka bhu 60 pi mā bhūmi 5 pi mā 3.*  
(The italicised words occur in a different style)<sup>27</sup>

Although this inscription does not supply any historical details about the town, it can be taken as evidence of the existence of the town during this period, which means that we can assume the town is at least a century older than Zanen presumed.

Another undated Licchavi period Sanskrit inscription was found in Sankhu, but it is only a fragment of two lines telling about a pious donation made to a Bhiksusaṅgha of (mahā)sāṅghik.<sup>28</sup> D. Vajrācārya asserts that this fragment shows that Sankhu was already an important place for the Mahāsāṅghika sect of Buddhist monks. One hundred years after the Buddha's demise, his followers split into two sects: those who followed the Buddha's doctrine strictly, and were called 'Theravādi' or "Sthavirvādi"; and those who changed the Buddha's doctrine according to the needs of the time, who were called "Mahāsāṅghika", later "Mahāyāna". As Vajrācārya found the word "Mahāsāṅghikabhikṣusaṅgha" on this inscription, he believed that "Mahāsāṅghika" monks went to the Sankhu area long before people began to call them "Mahāyāna". He considers this was probably the case because of the existence of the "Guṃvihāra", the forest monastery on the edge of a hill about three kilometres north of Sankhu, which he considers one of the oldest Buddhist monasteries in Nepal.<sup>29</sup>

During my research I copied sixty-two inscriptions (thirty-two from the town of Sankhu and thirty from the Vajrayoginī sanctuary) with the help of the archaeologist and epigrapher Sukrasagar Shrestha of the Department of Archaeology at Kathmandu. Most of the inscriptions are in old Newar script and are written in Sanskrit, Newar or in a mixture of both languages. They are mostly about the socio-religious associations (*guthi*), and describe their duties and their sources of income, specifically indicating land donations and referring to maintenance of religious monuments in the area. The above-mentioned inscription dated AD 538 is

the oldest that I copied. The others are mostly from the Malla period (thirteenth to eighteenth century). Some are from the time of the Shahs (1769 till today). However, only a few have been published with the complete texts and an analysis. Shankarman Rajvamsi included a descriptive index of eighteen of the medieval inscriptions found in Sankhu, including eight from the Vajrayoginī sanctuary (Rajvamsi 1963). Dilliraman Regmi recorded three medieval inscriptions dated AD 1655 (NS 775), 1729 (NS 849) and 1752 (NS 872) from the Vajrayoginī sanctuary (Regmi 1966:91–5, 286 and 304–5). Similarly, Vajrācārya and Tek Bahadur Shrestha (1980:306–9) recorded an inscription from the Shah period they found on the main gate of Vajrayoginī dated 1799 (vs 1856). These inscriptions, however, throw little light on the history of the town. Most of them, if installed by individuals, mention names of donor or reigning kings. See Table 6 to locate the inscriptions in the town.

**Table 6: Inscriptions in the Town of Sankhu**

Year AD	Location	Subject	Language
538 (460 Sāke)	Dugāhiti	land donation to a <i>guthi</i>	Sanskrit
619 (575 Sāke)	Sālkhā gāhiti	gift donation to monks	Sankkrit
1423 (NS 543)	Calākhū	offering of the tympanum to Aji <i>dvo</i>	Newar
1559 (NS 679), Kārtik	Ugra Library Sālkhā quarter	endowment to feed yogis from outside	Newar
1599 (NS 719)	Sālkhā Mahādev square	a verse praising Jotirliṅga Bhaṭṭāraka (Śiva) and about the offering of a stone image of a Bhagavatī with Maheśvara	Sanskrit
1623 (NS 743)	Sālkhā Mahādeva square	the installation of a Umāmaheśvara	Newar
1635 (NS 755)	Sālkhā Mahādeva square	the construction of the Jyotirliṅgeśvara temple and the offering of a golden <i>kalaśa</i>	Newar
1644 (NS 764?), Jyāsthā Kṛṣṇa	Sālkhā	the installation of a statue of the god Trivikrama	Newar
1682 (NS 802), Jyestha Śukla 1	Dugāhiti	endowment to a <i>guthi</i>	Newar+Skt.



1687 (NS 809)	Sāikhā Mahādeva square	installation of the Sarasvatī statue in the square	Newar
1691 (NS 811)	Sāikhā Mahādeva square	the installation of a Pāspati Mahādeva	Newar language
1692 (NS 812)	Calākhū	offering of ridges beam of the Ajui <i>dvo</i> temple	Newar
1692 (NS 812)		installation of a Mādhava Deva	Newar
1699 (NS 819), Jyestha Śukla 8	Dhomlā Mahādev square	installation of the Śiva temple Hanumān and Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and land endowment made to a <i>guthi</i> for the maintenance	Newar
1716 (NS 836)	Imlā	Sarāvata sataḥ	Newar
1732 (NS 852)	Sāikhā Mahādeva square	the restoration and reinstallation of the golden pinnacle of the Jotirlingeśvar	Mixed Skt. & Newar
1735 (NS 855)	Sāikhā Mahādeva square	installation of a Paśupati image	Newar
1763 (NS 883) Vaisākha Śukla	Sāikhā	restoration of Sāikhā platform and endowment for a <i>guthi</i>	Skt. & Newar
1788 (NS 908)	Dhalamko	installation of a rest place	Newar
1789 (NS 909)	Dhalamko	installation of a rest place	Newar
1789 (NS 909)	Śālinadī	restoration of the Dhalampusataḥ	Newar
King Ranabahadur Shah (1777– 99)	Sāikhā Mahādeva square	installation of a rest place?	unreadable
1801 (NS 921)	Sāikhā Mahādeva square		unclear
1805 (NS 925), Bhādra	Bhaudhvākā	unclear	Newar+Skt.
1813 (NS 933)	Dhalamko	establishment of a rest place	Newar+Skt.
1814 (NS 943)	Sāikhā	rest place was installed	Newar
1843 (NS 963), Vaisākha Śukla	Sāikhā Mahādeva square	installation of a Mahādeva image	Newar Skt. Mixed

1843 (NS 963), Phālguṇa Śukla	Sāikhā Gaṇeśa	restoration of the temple	Newar
1845 (NS 965)	Sāikhā	arrangement of offerings to Bhima Bhairava.	Newar
1896 (NS 1016)	Calākhū	offering made to Aji <i>dyo</i>	Newar
1899 (NS 1019)	Sāikhā	installation of Viṣṇu temple	Newar
1910 (NS 1030)	Sāikhā	installation of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa temple	Newar
1998 (NS 1118)	Sāikhā Mahādeva square	restoration of the Mahādev temple and surrounding monuments in the Mahādeva square	Newar and Nepali

Whether Sankhu ever was a sovereign kingdom is another unsettled matter. The legend Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna presents Śaṅkhadeva as the founder king of Sankhu, but there is no inscriptional evidence to indicate that any king named Śaṅkaradeva ever ruled Sankhu in the past.

Historians found three kings named Śaṅkaradeva or Śaṅkhadeva. The first was from the Licchavi period and ruled over Nepal between AD 383 and 423 (Regmi 1997:23). The second ruled from AD 784–96 and the third from AD 1069–83 (NS 189–203).<sup>30</sup> There is no precise evidence, however, to prove that any one of them ruled Sankhu as a sovereign king. Daniel Wright's edited chronicles (1877:206) and the Bhāṣāvamsāvalī (Lamsal 1966:56), both nineteenth-century chronicles, also mention one Śaṅkaradeva as the founder of Sankhu. Another nineteenth-century Padmagiri's chronicle, compiled by Hasrat (1970:62), repeats the same story and narrates that when king Amara Malla asked his courtiers and counsellors about the founding of the villages under his rule, they replied that Sankhu was founded by king Śaṅkaradeva and consecrated by Vajrayoginī. However, many historians criticise these chronicles for their inaccurate historicity. So, we must use them as sources cautiously. Zanen identifies the tenth-century Śaṅkaradeva as the founder of the town. However, he also believes that Sankhu has probably never been a sovereign kingdom. Considering the tradition of dual (*dvairājya*) and regional (*ardharājya*) kingdoms – which allowed the division of a kingdom between two brothers, or father and son, or maternal uncle and uterine nephew – Zanen indicates that Sankhu may, however, have obtained royal status.<sup>31</sup>

Śaṅkaradeva's first grandson, Mānadeva (Petech 1958:26), who unwittingly killed his father, went for penance to the forest monastery (Guṃvihāra) situated north of the town of Sankhu, where the temple of Vajrayoginī is located (Vajrācārya and Malla 1985:123). From this

historical fact, we may assume that Śaṅkaradeva had a link with Sankhu, but the chronicle does not provide any evidence to confirm it. The Bhāṣāvamśāvalī also mentions the story of Mānadeva's killing of his father, king Dharmadeva. The story goes on to describe Mānadeva's confession to Vajrayoginī and his request that he free him from the sins he had committed unintentionally. The goddess Vajrayoginī instructed him to build the Khāsā *caitya* (the present Baudhnāth), and indeed he did (Paudyal 1963:74–7). According to the MMC manuscript:

In the year 1858 Kaligata, in the night of the full-moon of the Kārtika month prince Mānadeva, the son of Śaṃkhadeva offered his body to the goddess Ugratārā by burning his body. He covered his body with cotton as a great light (*mahādīpa*) and merged his body with that of the goddess (MMC: 14–15).

The MMC gives this note in connection with the foundation story of Sankhu, so it is clearly an attempt to link Mānadeva with Śaṅkaradeva, the founder king of Sankhu. Other chronicles only mention Mānadeva taking refuge, for the rest of his life, at Guṃvihāra or Vajrayoginī. The MMC is the first chronicle that mentions his self-immolation at Vajrayoginī. However, the Kaligata year attested for this act complicate matters, as Nepalese history does not provide any evidence for any prince called Mānadeva living at that time. From the historical point of view, the presentation of Mānadeva as the son of king Śaṅkaradeva is still a matter for confusion. In his explanation of the chronicle, the historian Dilliraman Regmi assumed that there was a Mānadeva immediately after Śaṅkaradev.<sup>32</sup>

Until further evidence has been discovered it is difficult to link the legendary king Śaṃkhadeva of Sankhu with any of the historical kings named Śaṅkaradeva. Whether the legendary king Śaṃkhadeva was an invention of the chronicle writer, or his endeavour to mystify the Nepalese history, is difficult to say.

During the medieval period (thirteenth to eighteenth century), Sankhu was a princely state or a fort under the control of Kāntipur or Bhaktapur, but it was not a separate kingdom, as the chronicles testify. However, Sankhu is mentioned on several occasions in the oldest chronicle of Nepal, the Gopālarājavamśāvalī:

In 1242 AD, Tripura surrounded Sankhu, but it did not fall. The invading Echimis were defeated.  
(Vajrācārya and Malla 1985:136)

In 1334 AD on Monday, Āśvina Kṛṣṇa Pratipadā, Abhaṅgapatirāja and his brother Sankhu Mulmi stole the ornaments belonging to the Brāhmaṇas at

Sankhu and the Brāhmaṇas expelled them from there. Then Anekarāma Mahātha had killed them.

(Vajrācārya and Malla 1984:150).

In 1336 AD on the day of Phālguṇa Kṛṣṇa Pratipadā, the Khaṣīyās returned after taking ransom. They set fire on the settlement of Sankhu.

(Vajrācārya and Malla 1985:151)

Gyanmani Nepal mentions that during the reign of Abhay Malla (AD 1215–55), Sankhu was one of a number of strong forts, and that the chiefs of these forts revolted against their masters by shifting from one royal patron to another (Nepal 1997:119). The Gopālārājavaṃśāvalī mentions that there was a revolt in Sankhu in 1370. Both King Jayārjundeva and Jayasthiti Malla together penetrated the Sankhu fort, and then looted and burnt the town.<sup>33</sup>

Padmagiri's Vaṃśāvalī mentions that king Svarṇa Malla (1504–19) of Bhaktapur divided Sankhu into two parts and gave one half to his brother (Hasrat 1970:58). According to the Bhāṣāvaṃśāvalī and the Padmagiri's Vaṃśāvalī, king Surya Malla (1520–30) captured Sankhu and stayed there for a few years as ruler. He also began the ritual procession of Vajrayoginī together with the statues of Yogeśvar Mahākāla Bhairava, Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī from the temple to the town (Lamsal 1966:56 and Hasrat 1970:62–3). However, other materials do not confirm these facts. We will return to the festival of Vajrayoginī in Chapter 14.

The MMC mentions Jayavir Malla Deva as being the king of Sankhu in the year AD 1541 (folio 24). The same chronicle mentions that Trailokya Malla Deva, and Queen Gangadevi came to rule Sankhu together with king Tribhuvan Malla Deva from Bhaktapur in AD 1560. The chronicle, however, is not clear about the period of their reign; neither is it clear whether Sankhu was a separate kingdom from Bhaktapur or Kathmandu in those years (MMC: folio 26).

Another chronicle related to Vajrayoginī and Sankhu is the Śānti Svasti Saphu (SSS), a manuscript containing 52 folios written on both sides. Its language is old Newar and it is written in Newar script. Its first folio begins with the words “Om Namaḥ Sri Vajrayoginī ...” It seems that the SSS is a record book kept by the Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu. The scribes have written down all major events, especially the religiously inauspicious incidents related to Vajrayoginī, and all the worship and fire sacrifices carried out to purify or pacify the goddess after such occasions. The incidents recorded in this manuscript cover the period from AD 1525 to 1795 (Nepal era 645 to 915). It also includes many politically important events from those years. From the writing, it can be concluded that more

than two scribes succeeded each other in compiling the chronicles. The historical notes found in the SSS are correct when we compare them with other chronicles. The SSS also mentions Vira Malla Deo as a king in the year 1541, but it is not clear if he was the king of Sankhu. Similarly, it also mentions the coming of Trailokya Malla, the Bhaktapur king, Tribhuvan Malla and Queen Ganga Taken to Sankhu, and the installation of a wall around Sankhu in AD 1561 (SSS: folio 3a).

The Padmagiri's chronicles notes that king Jayaprakash Malla (1736–68) of Kathmandu took possession of Sankhu together with four other townships (Hasrat 1970:86). Before Nepal fell into the hands of the Gorkhā, the three city kingdoms of the Valley experienced frequent power struggles within their respective palaces. Sankhu, as a town under Kathmandu at that time, also had to experience the consequences of these struggles. Rivalry between king Jayprakasa and his son Jyotiprakasa in Kathmandu was obvious, and although Sankhu's courtiers, such as Namasim, were loyal to Jyotiprakasa, the people in Sankhu were loyal to Jayprakasa.

Long before Prithivinarayan Shah captured Kathmandu, he intended to capture Sankhu, because it was a strategically important point on the trade route to Tibet. In 1746, with the help of the king of Bhaktapur, Ranajit Malla, Prithivinarayan attacked the towns of Sankhu, Cāngu, Mahādeva Pokharī and Nāldum, but he failed to capture them. Sankhu eventually came under his control only after he captured Kathmandu in 1768.<sup>34</sup> There are no records found to clarify whether Sankhu resisted the Gorkhālī invaders. After Gorkha conquest of Nepal, Sankhu lost its strategic importance because the three rival kingdoms in the Valley lost their sovereignty, and Sankhu became incorporated into the large Gorkha kingdom.

Colonel Kirkpatrick writes a very brief note about Sankhu. He arrived in Nepal in 1793, two decades after the Gorkhā conquest. He records:

It is proper, however, to notice here, that the most reasonable of my informants would not admit Sankhu to have ever been comprehended in the population attributed to Kathmandu. Sankhu was formerly a place of great magnitude, but does not contain at present above a thousand families. (Kirkpatrick 1811: 161).

The Gorkhālī rulers turned the land around Sankhu into crown land, *jāgir*, to reward its functionaries.<sup>35</sup> For such lands each farmer had to pay either in kind or in cash to the crown. From a note of F.B. Hamilton, it becomes clear that land around Sankhu was turned *jāgir* for the income of Queen regent: "A fine town, named Sangghu, is the Jagir, or jointure lands of the

Maharani, or the Queen Regent, and is worth annually 4000 rupees.” (1819: 211–12).

Culturally, Sankhu remained important because of the temple of Vajrayoginī situated above the town. Not only during the Licchavi and Malla periods, but also during the Shah period (from 1769 onwards), kings as well as the Rana prime ministers continuously supported the Vajrayoginī sanctuary in order to ensure that the traditional worship and sacrifices were performed. They also paid attention to the maintenance of the temples. Almost every folio of the SSS carries notes mentioning kings or queens, regents or prime ministers, Pramāna or Dovāra who spent this or that amount of money for the purpose of such and such a worship or sacrifice at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. Several notes also mention the offering of golden or silver ornaments and dresses to the deities, the restoration of one or the other temple, or the offering of roofs or pinnacles to the temples.

Until the end of the Rana regime in 1951, the government used to appoint a *dvāre*, the town head or chief, to look after local administrative work and revenue collections in Sankhu. He was also responsible for arranging several activities in connection with the festival in the town. In 1951, the tradition of appointing a *dvāre* was abolished with the introduction of democracy. In 1960 the Panchayat partyless political system, which functioned from national to village levels, was introduced in Nepal. Sankhu was divided into three Village Panchayats as local units, and these took over most of the tasks of the *dvāre*. In 1990, with the introduction of the multi-party system, the local units were renamed Village Development Committees (VDC), but the structure remained the same. In 2002 and again in 2011 the Government of Nepal announced Sankhu would become a municipality (Nagarpālikā), but this has yet to be realised.

## Conclusion

This chapter aimed to provide an overview of Sankhu with regard to its name, myth and history. The discussion of the myth of the creation of the town attempted to provide a connection between the town and its most important goddess, Vajrayoginī. This goddess, to whom the creation of the town and its first king is attributed, plays an important role in relation to the town and its people, as will become clearer from our discussion of her festival in Chapter 14. If we take the mythical story Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna into account, the town of Sankhu is more than 3,300 years old. Many people in the town accept this as the truth. However, as

discussed above, the historical documents do not support this date. Examination of the four Buddhist *caitya* with empty niches found in Sankhu allowed its history to be extended as far back as the second century AD, but no further. When it comes to inscriptional evidence, an undated fragment and an AD 538 inscription are the only sources that support the existence of the town during the Licchavi period (AD 185–879). For several centuries thereafter we lack any historical records dealing with the town. The *Gopālarājavamśāvalī*, the oldest chronicle of Nepal, provides sporadic remarks on Sankhu, but these date only from thirteen century onwards. A number of inscriptions in the town also date from the early fifteenth century. These, however, mainly relate to the installation of one or another statue or rest place. Three kings named Śaṅkharadev or Śaṅkhadev are found in different periods of Nepalese history, and our endeavours to connect the mythical king Śaṅkaradev with one of these historical kings of Nepal provided some further historical details of the town.

From the discussion it became apparent that it is not possible to link the mythical king to the historical kings of Nepal in any firm manner. In the section on the town's history, attempts were made to document all the available historical information related to Sankhu. Unpublished handwritten chronicles – SSS, MMC, MMC-I and MG among them – contain historical notes related to the town and the goddess Vajrayoginī. They are excellent records of good (*bhīm*) or bad (*mabhīm*) incidents related to Vajrayoginī, but they do not throw much light on the history of the town.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### SACRED SPACE AND THE GEOGRAPHY OF THE VALLEY OF SANKHU

In this chapter the geographical and physical setting of the town and its surrounding valley will be presented. I also provide some details of the town's pantheon, settlement pattern, houses and the architecture, all of which will help in understanding sacred nature of the town.

#### Geography

Sankhu is situated in the north-east corner of the greater Kathmandu Valley. The legendary mountain Mañicūḍa (2,403 metres), to the north, is the highest nearby point. The holy lake of Mañicūḍa is situated near the top of Mañicūḍa Mountain, and the temple sanctuary of the goddess Vajrayoginī, or the Guṃbāhāḥ, the forest monastery, is located on its slope. The mountain of Mañicūḍa is also known as the forest with the monastery (Guṃbāhāḥguṃ or Gubhāguṃ). The Mañicūḍa pond discharges its water into two different directions: to the east, in a river called by various names (Mañisaila, Śailāja, Śaila, Nālandhi, Nārāyaṇī and Nārīkhusi or Śālinadī); and to the west, in the Manamatī (Prakashman 1999:2). Religiously, both rivers are very important.

The Śālinadī meets the Budhikhusi River at the south-east end of the Sankhu valley, and when it arrives at the south-west corner of the valley, it joins the Manamatī. Until the Manamatī meets the Bāgmatī it retains its name. The town of Sankhu is separated from the Gubhāguṃ forest by a rivulet called Kolāgāl. To the east of the town is a forested mountain, Thuguṃ, which stretches out to Nagarkot and Mahādevapokharī Mountain (2,164 m). The Budhikhusi River separates the Thuguṃ and Itāguṃ forests. The Itāguṃ forest is located to the south of Sankhu, across the river Budhikhusi, and stretches out from the mountain Nagarkot, expanding to the top of Cāngu on its western side.

This Thuguṃ hill is also known as Cāngu, because of the temple of Cāngu Nārāyaṇa located at its summit. To the west of Sankhu, across the



Manamatī, lie the villages of Cugām, Gāgalphedī and Ālāpot. These are located at the bottom of the Kāgeśvarī hill, part of Maṇicūḍa Mountain.

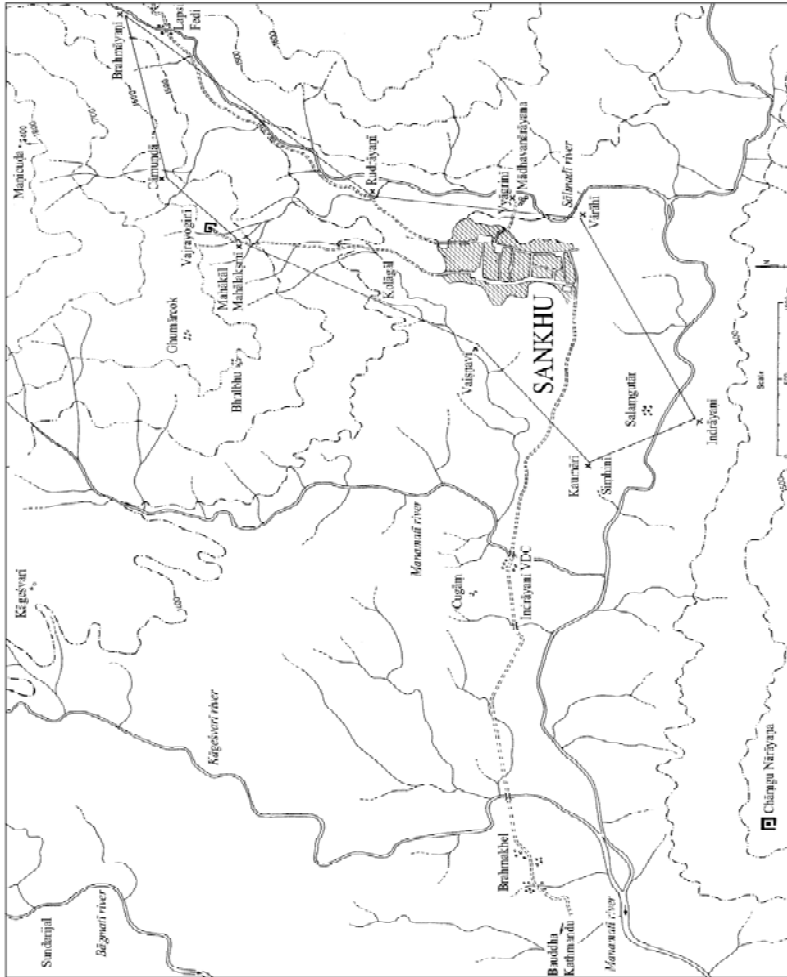
As already mentioned, the goddess Vajrayoginī is said to have cleaved the mountain between Cāṃgu and Kāgeśvarī to drain the water from the valley of Sankhu. Cāṃgu and Kāgeśvarī are about 6 km apart. If they were ever connected, the valley of Sankhu would become a bowl filled with water. We cannot discard the idea that it may indeed once have been a lake. Sankhu valley is estimated to be about 6 km from north to south and 8 km from east to west. Small hamlets like Gāmsulī, Khoriyāgām, Dāchī, Bramhakhel, Ālāpot, Gāgalphedī, Indrāyaṇī (Cugām), Bilgoṭh, Bhulbhū, Ghumārcok, Lapsephedī, Pālubārī and Bisvaṃmarā are located within this valley (see map).

The forested mountains around the valley of Sankhu have been encroached upon by human settlements and farmlands. The Parbate community inhabits the small village of Salaṃbuṭār. All these settlements are covered by the name of Sankhu, because they fall within the boundaries of the valley of Sankhu. Sankhu town itself, however, is located in the middle of a fertile plain. The Parbate community inhabits the small village of Salaṃbuṭār.

### **The physical features of the town**

The people of Sankhu often say that the town has the shape of a conch shell. The conch shell, carried by the Hindu god Viṣṇu, has religious significance, and they are used for offering liquid oblations to deities. They are also blown as trumpets (Manandhar 1986:243). The idea of the shape of Sankhu may be derived from the Maṇisāila Mahāvadāna (MM), which says the town has a conch shell (*śaṃkha*) shape. Whether it indeed once had that shape is debatable,<sup>1</sup> but today the town, which has expanded in different directions, bears little resemblance to any shell. Sankhu does still retain some of characteristics described in MM, such as the city, the quarters, the gates, the nine monasteries, and the eight mother goddesses associated with the town.

Zanen (1986) was the first academic to discuss the structure of the town, and as illustrations he supplied maps of its interior as well as its exterior surroundings.<sup>2</sup> He assumes that the construction of Sankhu was carried out in accordance with the traditional theory of Indo-Aryan town planning. At the same time he asserts that the configuration of the town has several symbolic components that symbolise a *mandala* (1986:148–50).



Map 3: The Valley of Sankhu and the shrines of eight mother goddesses (*aṣṭamātrikā*) around the town of Sankhu.

The *mandala* is a ritual figure with the shape of a circle. As we disused elsewhere, Zanen (1986) assumes the eight shrines of the mother goddesses outside the town of Sankhu take the form of the outer circle of the *mandala*. The eight mother goddesses inside the town provide a similar inner circle. The locations of the mother goddesses indicated in the MM are to be found at the mentioned places, but when we consider these locations they hardly resemble a *mandala*.<sup>3</sup> However, an imagined *mandala* model for a city or a town need not necessarily correspond to physical positions, but may rather only be a religious symbol.

### The city wall

The fortification of towns and villages in the Nepal Valley was already prominent in Licchavi times and this tradition continued till the fall of the Malla rule in 1769 (Korn 1977:12–16). As already mentioned, Sankhu was once an important fort. One feature of such a fort was an encircling wall. According to Vāstu Vidyā, fortifications were a necessary element for towns and cities built in ancient times.<sup>4</sup> There is just one historical note in the chronicles that tells of a wall being built around Sankhu in AD 1561 (see above). There is no further evidence of a wall, and after the 1769 Gorkha conquest of Nepal any defences around the town would have lost their significance because the town stopped serving as a fort. There is now no town wall, though some people claim remnants can still be found in some places.

### Gates (*dhvākā*) and their significance

The gates are an essential part of a fortified town. There are now four gates (*dhvākā*) in Sankhu, each with a distinct symbolic function: Dhomlādhvākā, situated in the north-west, is for carrying the processional statues of Vajrayoginī to the town during her festival. Sālkhādhvākā, in the north-east, is used for carrying away the dead bodies to the cremation grounds. Bhaudhvākā, situated in the south-west, is for bringing brides into the town. Sāṃgādhvākā, in the south-east, is for giving away daughters in marriage. The gates are still used for these purposes. Dead bodies are not allowed into the town. If a resident dies outside the town, the body is taken directly to a cremation ground. In January 2000, when I was nearby Sankhu doing my fieldwork, a person from a Śreṣṭha family died in a hospital in Kathmandu and was taken to the Sankhu cremation ground. The body was taken straight there, avoiding entry into the town. These gates have recently been reconstructed. The old Sālkhādhvākā gate

had a three passages and was decorated with stone images. In the late 1970s, it was demolished and a new gate was built which allowed easier passage. Nobody in Sankhu remembers what the old Dhomlādhvākā gate looked like, but the new gate built in the 1980s does not have the features of a traditional gate. Bhaudhvākā and Sāmḡādhvākā gates were reconstructed only in the 1990s. Both these have been reconstructed with plaster figures and are painted in a non-traditional manner.

Apart from the four main gates, there are eight other gates in Sankhu. These are Vāphale, Dhalamko, Dugāhiti and Lāmko in the eastern half of the town; and Yālmādo, Kusicā, Pukhulāchi and Gasicā in the western half. The original structure of these gates has long since disappeared.<sup>5</sup> Only the Dhalamko gate has been reconstructed recently, in 1998. Through these eight gates, effigies of spirits are dragged away, symbolizing the expulsion of evil spirits from the town during the festival of Gathāmmugaḥcarhe, on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the Dillā month (July/August).

Corpses of children who die before having undergone their first birth purification rite (*macābu byamkegu*) are carried away through these gates to their burial grounds (*macā gāḥ*). Such corpses are not cremated, nor do they receive any funeral rituals. People consider them *agati* or “motionless”; they may eventually turn into bad spirits and cause trouble for people. Evil spirits are considered to live outside these gates, and people dispose of food outside them to ward off such spirits when they carry out Kaytā pūjā, marriage or old age ceremonies (*jamko*). They also offer foods outside one of these gates when they believe a spirit has possessed them.

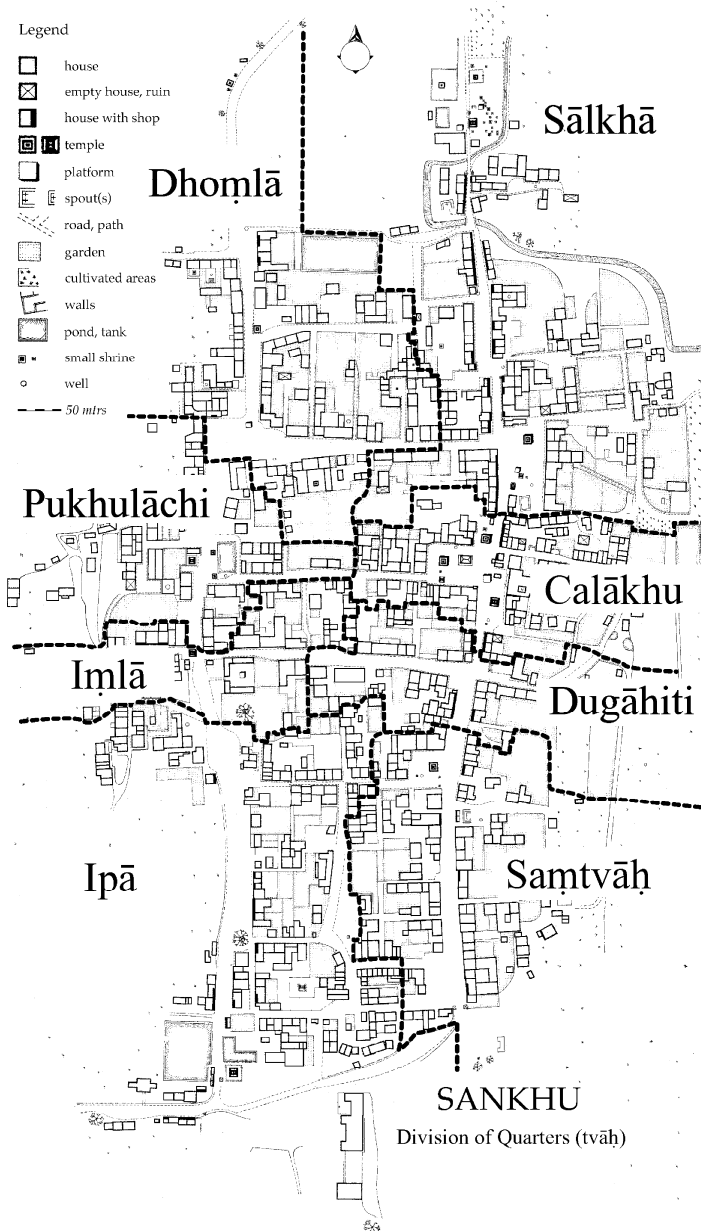
Newar low castes, such as Po, Nāy, Doṃ and Duim, dwell outside these gates. This tradition has, however, changed considerably during the past few decades. People use these gates when they go to their fields or visit places outside the town. Among the eight minor gates, Dhalamkodhvākā is the most important for tradition, as it is from here that the Vajrācārya priests go to the Śālinadī River to fetch water every morning to bathe the processional statues of Vajrayoginī during her festival. This gate is also used to carry the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa back and forth from the river to the town everyday during the month-long Svasthānī festival. Between the Bhaudhvākā and Sāmḡādhvākā gates there is one further passage from the town to the southern Talejukvātha sub-quarter, but it is not considered a gate. The actors of the sword procession (*pāyāḥ*) use it during the Dasain festival, and people living around this area use it for worship and as a place to offer foods to the effigy of the ghost god (*bhu dyo*) during the festival of Gathāmmugaḥ.



Plate 4: An old man in front of the brides' gate (Bhaudhvākā, April 1995).

### Quarters (*tvāḥ*)

In the Newar language, *tvāḥ* denotes a residential area or quarter of a town.<sup>6</sup> As we know from the legend MM, Jogdev constructed Sankhu by assimilating seven *grāma* or villages.<sup>7</sup> He created eight quarters (*tvāḥ*) in the town.<sup>8</sup> They are Dhomlā, Sāikhā, Calākhū, Dugāhiti, Suṃtol, Ipātol, Iṃlātol, and Pukhulāchi. In many respects, eight is considered an auspicious number by religious people.<sup>9</sup> Besides the eight main quarters, there are several sub-quarters.<sup>10</sup> As Zanen explains, the boundaries of the eight quarters in Sankhu are bisected from north to south and divided into an eastern and western parts (1986:142).



Map 4

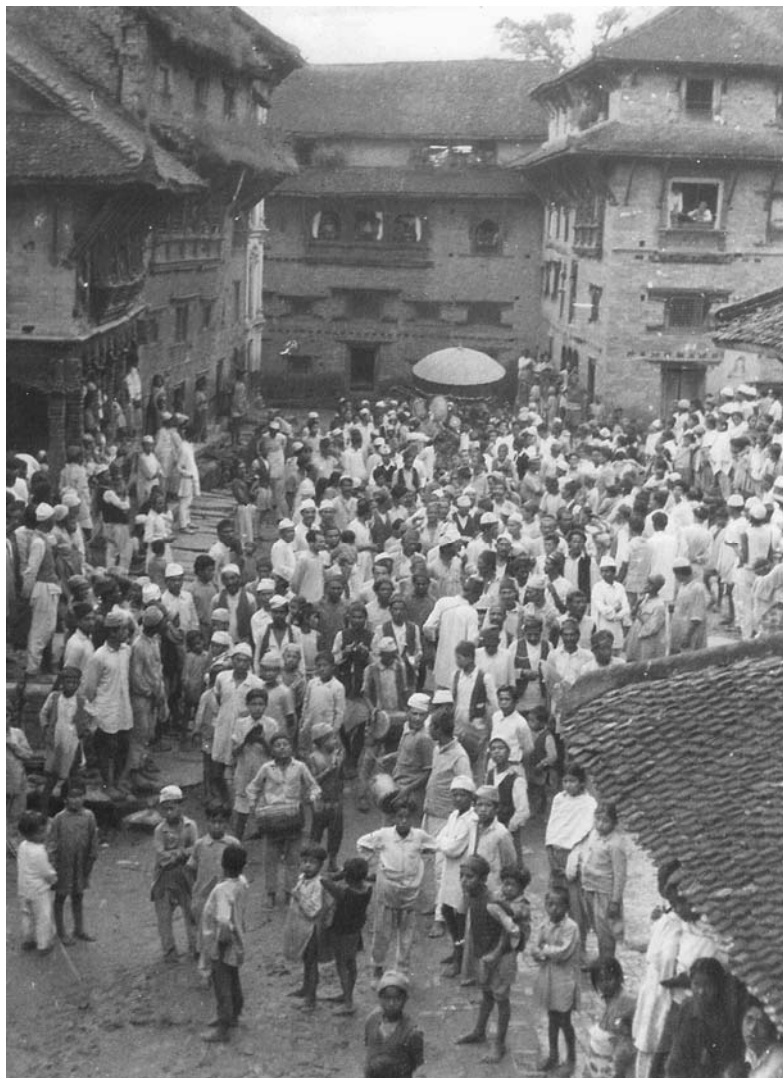


Plate 5: The people in Sankhu during a procession of a god in the centre of Dhompā quarter in the mid 1950s (photo courtesy of Colin Rosser).

Since there are no clear indications of the boundaries of the quarters, it is not easy to identify them geographically. However, each has its own Gaṇeśa shrine, and families belonging to that area worship at that shrine every morning.

This helps us demarcate the quarters. These traditional delineations of the quarters are still respected, even after the ward boundaries of the Village Panchayat were created in 1960. There are five further shrines to Gaṇeśa in Sankhu beyond the eight identified with *tvāḥ*, and people may worship these during festivals. Only the Gaṇeśa shrine in the Dhomlā quarter is worshipped by the people of other quarters during major festivals. In general, Gaṇeśa is considered a god, who bestows health, wealth and knowledge. The only inscription found with respect to a Gaṇeśa shrine is in the Sālkhā quarter, and is dated 1843 (NS 963). It mentions the restoration of a three-tiered stone roof of the Gaṇeśa temple. Each quarter also has its own place for singing devotional songs (*bhajan*), though the people of the Imlā quarter join the Pukhulāchi quarter in this.

During the Gathāmmugaḥ festival, each quarter makes at least two spirit effigies. On this occasion the quarters are divided into two sections to fulfill the duties of making the effigies. During the Gunhi punhi festival, each quarter carries out a procession of cows (*sāyāḥ*), the stick dance (*ghintāṃghisim*), the dance of bushmen (*baṃmanū pyākham*) and several other dances and dramas. The activities carried out during different festivals mark the local identity of each quarter. However, during the festival of Vajrayoginī, only four quarters – Dhomlā, Calākhu, Imlātol and Suṃtol – have rest houses for the deities (*dyo sataḥ*). Each year two quarters will have their turn to receive the deities: Dhomlā together with Sālkhā, Calākhu with Dugāhiti, Suṃtol with Ipātol, and Imlā with Pukulāchi. Each time, two quarters share in the reception of the deity, necessitating cooperation between the inhabitants of the quarters concerned.

### Palace (*lāyku*)

Although no physical remains are left, the old palace of the town is supposed to have been situated in the Imlā quarter, at the centre of the western part of the town. The people in Sankhu still consider it as the royal area (*lāyku*). The palace area is also known as *bāhāḥ*, which could mean a monastery or a courtyard in Newar language. In 1968, during the laying of the foundation of the present building of Pukhulāchī VDC, walls of old buildings were traced in the ground. As the bricks from these crumbled walls were sufficient to construct the buildings of the VDC, there was no need to buy new ones. Unfortunately, no inscriptions or other important



materials were found during the excavation. The king's platform (*jujudabū*) is still maintained inside the VDC compound. The reception of the royal sword during the festival of Vajrayoginī, and the reception of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa during that god's festival still take place on this platform.

A rest place standing just outside and to the west of the assumed location of the palace is still known as the "royal rest place" (*lāyku phālcā*). During the Vajrayoginī festival, the person carrying the royal sword must sit down at this rest place before and after the completion of the procession of the deities. The announcement of the festival is also carried out from this quarter.

The temple of Gaṇeśa with the eight mother goddesses (*mātrkā*), and the Nārāyaṇa temple, totally covered by a giant pipal tree, are also located at the centre of this quarter. On the day of *mū jātrā*, when the procession of Vajrayoginī arrives in this quarter, worship is carried out there on behalf of the reigning king. Unlike other Newar towns, where the temple of the royal goddess Taleju is situated next to the palace, in Sankhu her temple is situated about 500 m south of the palace.

Zanen considered that the location of the palace area in Sankhu follows the traditional pattern of cities. The royal palace should not only be located at the centre of the town or kingdom, but is also considered the centre of the universe, and is ideally identified with Mount Meru.<sup>11</sup> The palace of Sankhu is, however, not located in the centre of the town.

### **The procession route (*mūlāmpu*)**

Most ritual activities in the town are carried out in connection with the eight main quarters. A procession road (*mūlāmpu* or *pradakṣiṇāpatha*) links these quarters, and is very important for the execution of various ritual activities, including the processions of gods and goddesses, marriage and old-age ceremonies (*jamko*) and funeral processions. Except for funerals, which travel anticlockwise to reach the cremation ground, all other processions travel a clockwise route, which renders them auspicious. Religious people always go clockwise around temples or shrines whenever they pass them. Again, except for funerals, all processions must pass through the main road of all the main quarters.

### **The commercial quarter**

Sankhu was one of the most famous trade routes to Tibet until the 1950s. In 1967, as the Kodari–Tatopanī motorway was constructed through

Banepa, Sankhu lost its importance as a trade centre. Gradually the flow of people from the northern hills, who until the 1950s would crowd the town's bazaar, declined. Colin Rosser, who did fieldwork in Nepal in 1956–7, expressed his great sadness at finding such a previously busy town desolated and deserted when he visited it in the late 1980s.<sup>12</sup> Sankhu became even more isolated after another motorway linking Melanchi with the Kodari road at Panchkhal was constructed in 1991. Despite these setbacks, there are now more than two hundred shops in Sankhu, but it has become impossible to bring back its lost fortune. The main bazaar, in the Sālxhā quarter, still remains the centre of the town and most shops are concentrated in this quarter. The area between Mahādevadvāḱā gate and Calākhū quarter border is called the market (*bajār*) of the town. The front parts of the ground floor of every house in this quarter contain one or more shops. In the last three decades several shops have also opened elsewhere in the town. The recent bus terminal outside the Bhaudhvāḱā gate has encouraged people several shops to open in the area, but this has not yet diminished the importance of Sālxhā quarter as the commercial centre of the town. Occasional mass meetings of different political parties take place at the centre of the Sālxhā quarter. In short, the Sālxhā quarter remains the main public and commercial centre of the town.

### Upper, lower and middle divisions (*cvay*, *kvay* va *dathu*)

In most Newar cities, towns, and villages, many forms of an upper–lower (*cvay* and *kvay*) division are found. In Kathmandu such a division already existed in the medieval period (Shrestha *et al.* 1986:29). Such divisions are apparent in the towns of Bhaktapur, Panauti, Theco and Nālā. In his article “The moiety system of the Newars”, Toffin demonstrates such divisions among the Newars in great detail.<sup>13</sup> He saw the river flowing close to the town as the main reason for the *cvay* and *kvay* division. Roughly half of the area of the town upstream is considered the upper section (*cvay*), and downstream is considered the lower section (*kvay*). In Sankhu, too, the division of *cvay* and *kvay* can be applied in this sense. Physically, the northern as well as the western parts of the town of Sankhu are slightly higher in altitude than the southern and the eastern parts. But the upper and lower divisions in the town descend from north to south. People in Sankhu assume that the four areas – Sālxhā, Dhomlā, Pukhulāchi and Calākhū – situated in the north of the town are the upper (*cvay*) part of the town, while Dugāhiti, Imḷā, Sumtol and Ipātol are considered to be the lower sections (*kvay*).

The notion of a middle (*dathu*) part also exists in Sankhu. Generally, people in Sankhu consider that the procession route Vajrayoginī follows between Iṃlā and Dugāhiti is the separation line between the upper and lower halves of the town. Almost the whole areas of Iṃlā and Dugāhiti are considered *dathu* or the middle of the town.



Plate 6: The Dhomlā quarter on a sunny winter's day (January 2000).

Superiority and inferiority feelings among the people of the two halves are prevalent in Sankhu. People living in the upper half of the town (*cvacimi*) consider themselves superior to the people living in the lower half of the town (*kvacimi*). Sālkhā even feels superior to the other three quarters of the upper half of the town; they also consider people living in the Suṃtol quarter to be the most inferior and uncivilised. The accent of the Newar language spoken by the people in the two halves also is different: the people in the upper half affect the Kathmandu accent, while the Bhaktapur accent is prevalent in the lower half. During the past three decades, the people in Sankhu have generally adopted the Kathmandu accent in public, but when they talk among themselves their own accent is still prevalent.

In the past, many fights took place between the people of the upper and the lower halves of Sankhu. Such fights have gradually diminished, however, and have begun to be restricted to the rivalry between just two of the quarters – Sālkhā in the upper half, and Suṃtol in the lower. Almost

every year, during the procession of Vajrayoginī, fights break out between these two quarters. Since the 1990 political change such fights have become less frequent, but they are still not uncommon. Politically, too, these two quarters remained divided into two fractions. Before the Panchayat time (1951–60) they were divided as Congress and Communist; during the partyless Panchayat days (1960–90) such divisions remained unchanged; while with the reintroduction of the multi-party system in 1990, they are now clearly divided between the two major parties of Nepal: most people in Sālkhā support the Nepali Congress Party and most people in Sumtol support the Communist Party of Nepal (UML). In the other quarters of the town there are supporters of different parties. To this day, people frequently use the terms *cvay* and *kvay* to indicate their direction of travel when they greet each other.

### Platforms (*dabū*)

A *dabū* is a square platform, 1.5 m high with a surface of 6 m<sup>2</sup> or more. *Dabū* are paved with bricks in their middle and stones at the edges. In most Newar towns and cities, such platforms are in the centre square of a quarter. In Sankhu, there are five main *dabū*: the god's platform (*dyo dabū*) in Dhomlā, which is dedicated to the goddess Vajrayoginī; the public platform (*janadabū*) in Sālkhā, which is for public use; the Devī platform (*devīdabū*) in Calākhū, which is dedicated to Devī and used for dances; and the palace platform (*lāy kudabū*) and the king's platform (*jujudabū*) in Imālā. The king's platform is situated inside the old palace square, presently inside the Pukhulāchī VDC compound. This platform is used only on two occasions: during the Vajrayoginī festival to receive the king's sword and during the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival to receive the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa statue. Common people do not step on this platform, because they respect it as divine space. Other platforms in the town are used for performing religious dances and dramas, such as the Devī dances and the dances and dramas of the eight-day long Gunhi punhi festival.

Religious people believe that the goddess Vajrayoginī comes to dance on the *dyo dabū* situated in Dhomlā quarter at midnight. They believe that the *dyo dabū* in Dhomlā and the *devīdabū* in Calākhū must not be used for purposes other than performing *devī* and other traditional religious dances and dramas. However, during the last decade or so, all the other *dabū*, except for the *jujudabū* situated inside the old palace square, have been used for the mass meetings of various political parties and other public meetings. In the beginning, some conservative, older people protested against such activities, but eventually they gave up. Recently, a notice has

been painted beside the Calākhu *dabū* requesting that it not be used for any public meetings. Two *dabū* have been built recently, one in Suṃtol (1996) and another in Mahādevadvākā Square (1998), but they are not considered to be as important as the old ones.

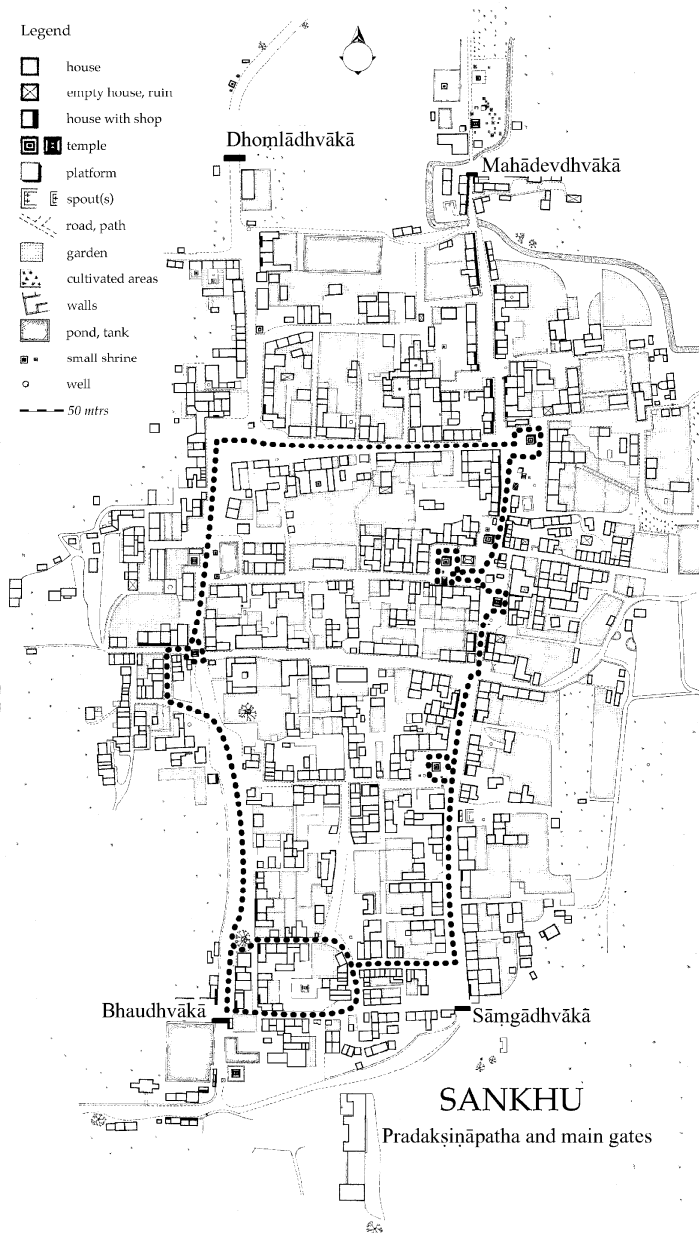
### Monasteries (*bāhāḥ*, *bahī*)

*Bāhāḥ* is derived from the Sanskrit word *vihāra* (monastery). Both *bāhāḥ* and *bahī* may refer to a monastery in Newar.<sup>14</sup> The *bāhāḥ* is a very important place for Newar Buddhists in Nepal.

The priestly Buddhist castes in Newar society, the Vajrācārya and the Sākya are associated with the *bāhāḥ* or *bahī* in the valley.

John Locke listed 357 Buddhist *bāhāḥ* and *bahī* in Nepal, including nine from Sankhu (Locke 1985, R. and V. Vajrācārya 1983). In the past, only celibate monks used the houses around the courtyard of such monasteries. They later retreated from their celibate practice, and their families filled the houses. Today, Sākya and Vajrācārya reside in such monasteries and could be called residential areas. In Sankhu the houses of most of the Vajrācārya priests are concentrated around the Duccheṃbāhāḥ, the main *bāhāḥ* in the town. As the MM describes, the ancestors of all the Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu descended from the Guṃbāhāḥ, the forest monastery. The MM states that there are nine *bāhāḥ* or Buddhist monasteries in Sankhu. One is Guṃbāhāḥ, at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary.<sup>15</sup> Duccheṃbāhāḥ is the only monastery in Sankhu that is considered a Buddhist *bāhāḥ* in the true sense. With a Buddhist *caitya* (*cibhā*) in the middle, it also contains a secret house of worship (*āgaṃcheṃ*) for the Vajrācārya priests. Most of the Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu live around this monastery. The godhouse of Vasundharā is located at the same *bāhāḥ*. In the Duccheṃ *bāhāḥ* in Sankhu all the buildings have three storeys, not two as W. Korn stated.<sup>16</sup>

In the month of Guṃlā (July–August), the Buddhists of Sankhu visit all nine monasteries for worship every morning. Most of the locations are unknown to the general public of Sankhu, because they are in ruins. Only a few are still recognisable as the remains of monasteries, but the Vajrācārya priests, as well as religious devotees, still know true location of all these monasteries. Occasionally, people also organise a month-long evening worship at them (*bāhāḥ pūjā*), especially during the month of Yaṃlā (August–September). They call it Yaṃlā *sevā* or the service of the Yaṃlā month.



Map 5

## Courtyards (*cuka*, *nani*)

There are many courtyards other than those of the monasteries. They are called *cuka* or *nani*. Gutschow saw striking similarities between Buddhist courtyards and royal courtyards. He assumes that the courtyard building represents the primeval form of a Newar house for people and deities alike (Gutschow 1985:364). It is notable that the palace courtyard in Sankhu is also known as *bāhāḥ* or monastery. It is, however, without any Buddhist shrines.

*Cuka* and *nani* are big or small public courtyards, mostly surrounded by individual houses. Sometimes, in the middle of such courtyards, images of gods and goddesses are placed. One such *nani*, situated north-west of the centre of the Sālkhā quarter, has two Buddhist *caityas*, and Nāsaḥcuka in Pukhulāchi with *Nāsaḥ dyo*, the god of music and dances. Some of the courtyards are made by individuals for their own use, such as the Manāchem *cuka* in the Imlā quarter, the Mākaḥ *cuka* in the Sālkhā quarter and Malli *cuka* in Ipātol. These *cuka* and *nani* are named either after the deities who reside there or the families of the people living around such courtyards.<sup>17</sup>

## Rest places or rest houses (*phalcā* or *sataḥ*)

*Phalcā* or *sataḥ* are wayside shelters, rest places built by wealthy individuals, religious groups or families to give shelter to travellers. The history of rest houses goes back to the Licchavi period. Although there is no evidence of any surviving from that period, W. Korn assumes that their appearance has not changed very much since that time.<sup>18</sup> People used to build rest places in order to obtain religious merit, and to gain access to heaven after death. When a rest place is built, a *guthi* is usually created to look after its maintenance. If not, the descendants take care of the maintenance of such rest places. In recent times few people have built such rest places, and most of those found in Sankhu today were built hundreds of years ago. Many have collapsed, but others have been repaired or reconstructed.

Many rest houses contain inscriptions on one of sidewalls giving information about the founder and his financial arrangements for a *guthi* to look after it. The oldest inscription I found in such a rest place was on the ground floor of the Sālkhā *sataḥ*, where the Ugra Library is housed these days. According to the inscription, it was first built in AD 1559 (NS 679) (Rajvamsi 1963:11), though the present building of this *sataḥ* is newly reconstructed so that gives no impression of being a traditional Newar

*sataḥ*. An inscription found at a ruined rest place of Dhalamko sub-quarter is dated AD 1813 (NS 933). Another inscription found lying on the surface above the Sālxhā stone taps (*gāhiti*) is dated AD 1814 (NS 943). It reads that a rest place was built there, though none is to be found today. Two inscriptions found on the wall of Dhalamko rest place are dated AD 1788 (NS 908) and AD 1789 (NS 909). I found another inscription on the wall of a rest place near the Dhomlādhvākā gate. Its date was not decipherable. The inscription attached on the wall of the Sarāvata *sataḥ* mentions that it was built in AD 1716 (NS 836).



Plate 7: Sarāvata *sataḥ* rest house in the Imlā quarter (2001).

Although both *phalcā* and *sataḥ* can be called rest places in English, their features are slightly different. Usually a *phalcā* consists of an open space under a roof where people may sit down to rest, or where travellers may spend the night; while a *sataḥ* for travellers consists of an open space on the ground floor, with closed rooms on the first floor (see Plate 7). In the past, persons of the unclean Newar castes, the Jogi, used to occupy such a *sataḥ*, but nowadays only one such family still lives in a *sataḥ* in Sankhu. Old *phalcā* and *sataḥ* are usually richly decorated with wooden carvings and stone statues of gods and goddesses. *Sataḥ* are built with artistic traditional wooden windows. Siṃgapu *sataḥ*, Dhomlā Jogi *sataḥ* and Sarāvata *sataḥ* in Imlā have excellent examples of such wooden windows. Unfortunately, wooden carvings and statues from most of the *phalcā* and



*sataḥ* have been stolen over the past few decades, so only a few remain intact.

Other important *sataḥ* in Sankhu are the Dhomlā, Calākhū, Imlā and Suṃtol *dyo sataḥ*. These four *sataḥ* are the residing places for the processional statue of Vajrayoginī during her procession in Sankhu every year. Pukhulāchi Bhindyo *sataḥ* and Ipātvāḥ *sataḥ* are also used for singing devotional songs, while some of the *sataḥ* at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary are known as *bhṡay sataḥ* or the place of feasting. There are three more *sataḥ* in the Ipā quarter that are still functioning, and one *sataḥ*, situated at the centre of Ipā quarter was reconstructed in 1995. Dugāhiti *sataḥ*, situated next to *tvāḥ* Gaṇeśa, was reconstructed in 1999. Two rest places situated in Pukhulāchī quarter collapsed in recent times and have not been reconstructed. Vāphalcā *Sataḥ*, situated in the Sālkhā quarter, is in a dilapidated condition and may collapse shortly if not properly repaired.

### Ponds (*pukhu*)

Ponds and water tanks are also essential parts of traditional Newar towns. They are considered to be auspicious as holy jars (*kalaśa*). There used to be eight ponds in Sankhu, but two have disappeared. Two ponds deemed *kalaśa* are situated outside the Bhaudhvākā gate: one at its right, the other at its left. People consider these as *kalaśas* and believe that seeing a *kalaśa* filled with water as one travels is auspicious and ensures success in one's enterprises. One pond outside the Dhalamko Gate and another at Kusicā Gate are known as *bijā pukhu*, where the plants (*bijāha*) used to make effigies of demons during the Gathāṃmugaḥ festival flourish. About two decades ago, the pond situated outside the Dhalamkodhvākā gate was filled and turned into a rice field to generate income for the Calākhū quarter's singing group (*bhajan*). The pond in Pukulāchi quarter is called *dyo pukhu* or the god's pond, and it is believed that the gods and goddesses take baths there. During the festival of Gathāṃmugaḥ, children in Sankhu take holy baths in this pond to drive away diseases. In the Dathunani sub-quarter, there used to be a small pond called Kvāpā *dyo pukhu*, which received this name from one of the nine Buddhist monasteries located here. Unfortunately, this pond also disappeared a long time ago. On the right side of Dhomlādhvākā gate is Palepukhu, where lotus flowers are grown. This pond is shrinking each year because of human encroachment. Mahādyo *pukhu*, situated on the right of Mahādev temple, is the god Śivā's pond. Children take baths in it during the festival of Gathāṃmugaḥ. There used to be a *guthi* for the maintenance of each of

these ponds, but now only the one belonging to the Mahādev pond remains. This *guthi* has, however, lost credibility because of its failure to maintain the pond.<sup>19</sup>

### Water channels (*dha*)

Sankhu has a well-planned water circulation and drainage system (*dha*). This is also known as *rāj kulo* or the king's water channel. A dam was built at the bottom of Lapsephedī village to lead the water from the Śālinadī River into the water channel. Before entering the town, it divides into two branches at Makhamtvācā: one leading to the Mahādev temple complex at the Dhomlā quarter, and the other going to the Mahādeva temple complex at the Sālkhā quarter. Both these places are considered religiously important and people take their baths there.<sup>20</sup> Several Hindu structures, including a Śiva temple and Śiva shrines, stand along the banks of the water channel. People in Sankhu use Sundarīghāt to perform their ancestor worship (*śrāddha*), as it is considered to be a holy place. They also offer water in the name of their relatives who have died during the past year. The water that passes through Sundarīghāt does not flow through the town, but turns towards its eastern rim, irrigating almost all the rice fields in the east of the town.

The branch of the water channel that arrives at the Dhomlā Mahādev temple complex enters the town through the Dhomlādhvākā gate. At the centre of the Dhomlā quarter the water channel divides into two: one flows to the eastern half of the town, the other to the western part. Since the channel carries its water from Tārātūrtha, people consider it as holy as Tārātūrtha itself. Until the 1960s, before modern taps were installed, people in Sankhu used to take their daily morning bath in this water channel, which reaches almost every corner of the town. This water channel also feeds all the ponds inside the town, and minor gutters join it at numerous points. This water channel also irrigates some of the rice fields in the western and southern parts of the town.

At three junctures, the water channel flows into a northerly direction: through Phisaḥ sub-quarter towards Takhāsi, through Sālkhā quarter towards Vāphalcā sub-quarter and through Dhalamko sub-quarter towards Bijāpukhu. Religious people consider water flowing in the northern (*uttaravāhīnī*) direction as auspicious. The water channels in Sankhu form one of the most sophisticated systems found in the Kathmandu Valley. Hence the saying, "The vain people in Sankhu wash their faces in the water channel." (*Sakvami bhvāsi dhalay khvāḥ sili*). This proverb used to give status to the people of Sankhu, today it is used to tease them because

the water channel is unhygienic. However, people still use the water channel to wash their clothes and dishes.

### **Wells (*tum̐thi*) and stone water spouts (*lvaham̐ hiti* or *gāhiti*)**

Wells (*tum̐thi*) and stone taps (*lvaham̐ hiti*) used to be the main source of drinking water in Sankhu, and they remain in use. There are twenty-two wells still functioning, while five have been abandoned as they have dried up. The traditional wells are 5–20 m deep. A lining of about 1.5–2.5 m deep is built into such wells. Each quarter in Sankhu has two to four of these wells. Once every year, during the Sithinakhaḥ festival, most of them are cleaned. Nāga, the divine serpents whom people credit for providing water, are supposed to be living in them. Those wells that have dried up, are said to have done so because the divine serpents abandoned them.

In Sankhu, there are sixteen stone spouts *lvaham̐hiti*. They are also called *gāhiti*, because they are located in a walled depression in the earth. Not all the stone spouts continue to function well, because the knowledge of how they are fed has been lost. No-one has a clue as to the sources of the taps. Often stories are told that when somebody went digging to find one of the sources in order to receive more water, they were met with burning oil wicks deep in the ground, whereupon the water dried up for ever. Historically important inscriptions are mostly found at *gāhitis*. The oldest (dated AD 538) found in Sankhu is from the Dugāhiti stone spout, and was discussed above. Another inscription found at the same location is dated AD 1682 (NS 802). Another inscription was recovered in 2010, while renovating the Sālkhā stone spouts. It is dated AD 619 (575 Śaka), from king Amśuvarman's time. It tells of the donation made to the benefit of the monks living in a monastery.<sup>21</sup> Other stone spouts in Sankhu, however, bear no inscriptions.

In addition to these traditional sources of drinking water, in the 1960s a reservoir was made to supply water to Sankhu and many modern taps were installed. However, these taps are not reliable, as during the rainy season they either stop working or produce undrinkable muddy water. Therefore, the people of Sankhu remain highly dependent for drinking water on the wells and traditional stone taps to this day.

### ***Chvāsah* stones**

*Chvāsah* are considered to be one of the important components of Newar towns. They may be located at a crossroads or at the side of a road.<sup>22</sup>

Usually a flat stone of a metre or less in size, though of no specific shape, is identified as a *chvāsaḥ*. In some cases there is no such stone, but a certain location within the crossroads is identified as a *chvāsaḥ*. In Sankhu there are one or more *chvāsaḥ* in each quarter. People believe that a so-called *chvāsaḥajimā*, a “grandmother” of the crossroads, resides at such places. *Chvāsaḥajimā* are not worshipped as deities and are considered impure. Every morning and evening every household must offer some food in the name of the *chvāsaḥajimā* from their kitchen before they themselves eat. If they forget to do so, it may attack weak members of the household, who will then fall ill. In my childhood, my father’s elder sister used to visit our home and, on several occasions when she felt sick, thought it was because she forgot to offer food to *chvāsaḥajimā*.

People ritually discard the umbilical cord of a newly born baby at a *chvāsaḥ*. Similarly, at the time of a death some of the clothes of the deceased are discarded at such places. People believe that ghosts and spirits reside at crossroads. The remnants of food are also disposed at the *chvāsaḥ* after festivals and ceremonial feasts. The Dyolā, the lowest caste of Newar society, collect things discarded on the *chvāsaḥ*.

### Crossroads (*dokā*)

Crossroads (*dokā*) are situated mostly at the centre of residential quarters in Newar towns. People believe that spirits and ghosts (*dokābhutcā*) reside in such places, and may cause people to fall ill. Twilight and midnight are favourable times for the ghosts (*dokābhutcā*) to attack people, and people therefore avoid passing such places at these moments. People think that spirits of the dead (*bhut pret*) and headless spirits (*murkattā*), whose height reaches the sky (*sarga pātā chasvāmha*), visit such places. It is believed that with the introduction of electricity into Sankhu, in 1971, the power of ghosts and spirits declined a great deal. Prior to electrification, people used to complain that such spirits would cause illnesses such as a headaches, dizziness, vomiting, diarrhoea and even death. Offerings of rice (*cvakābaji*), mustard seeds (*ikā, paḥkā*) and black lentils (*māy*) were made to the spirits to keep them at bay, and traditional healers (*vaidya*) know how to treat patients affected by them. Today, however, far fewer people offer foods to spirits at crossroads.

A crossroads is also a place to dispose of ritual items. When somebody dies, his eldest son (with a father’s death) or youngest son (with a mother’s death) has to dispose of three pieces of unburnt brick at the crossroads in their residential quarter before the deceased is carried away for cremation. On the eleventh day, when the purifying fire sacrifice (*ghaḥsu*) has been

performed, the remnants of the cremation, including the bricks used for the fire, are disposed off at the crossroads. Like the *chvāsah*, a crossroads is an impure place.

### Cremation grounds (*dipa*, *ghāt* and *macāgā*)

All Newar castes, except for the Jogi, cremate dead bodies. Cremation is the important last rite for a person. When Newar towns were constructed, appropriate places were chosen for the cremation ground: usually a short distance from the town, on a riverbank, preferably at a confluence. In Sankhu the main cremation ground<sup>23</sup> is situated to the north-east of the town on the banks of the two rivers, Śālinadī and Tārātirth. Different cremation sites (*bhājam*) are demarcated on the same ground for different castes. At the centre is located the shrine of Raudrāyaṇī, one of the eight mother goddesses of Sankhu. Here, she is also considered to be the consort of Masān Bhairava, the god of death. Although everybody is bound for the cremation ground at the end of his or her life, it is not an auspicious site to visit, as it is impure. However, as the residence of Mātrkā and Bhairava, the people of Sankhu must visit the cremation ground occasionally to worship these deities. Twice a year, the members of the Sikāko *guthi* visit the cremation ground to worship the Bhairava. This is carried out to placate the deity and to prevent him from causing any calamities to the town. A rest place provides shelter in the middle of the cremation ground.

Legend has it that before this cremation ground was created, the dead were carried to Sādhukolām *dipa*, where Brahmāyaṇī, another mother goddess, is located. It was very difficult for people to reach that place. One day, when a funeral procession was carrying a corpse towards the Sādhukolām, a saint appeared and suggested they change the cremation ground to the present location close to Sankhu. The saint also suggested that they offer a fire sacrifice with a snake, a sparrow, a fish and the head of a goat at the old cremation ground, to prevent it from causing any mischief. Around February or March, a fire sacrifice is carried out at Sādhukolām as a follow-up ceremony of the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival.

In addition to the main cremation ground, there are two *ghāt* where people cremate dead bodies: one on the bank of Śālinadī to the east of the town, the other on the bank of Asakhusi to the west. These two places, however, are not called *dipa* or *śmasān* (cremation ground) but *ghāt* or “the river bank for cremation”. When people are sure about the oncoming death of a person, or someone wishes death to come, then their relatives may carry them to one of these two *ghāt*. On the bank of both *ghāt*, stone

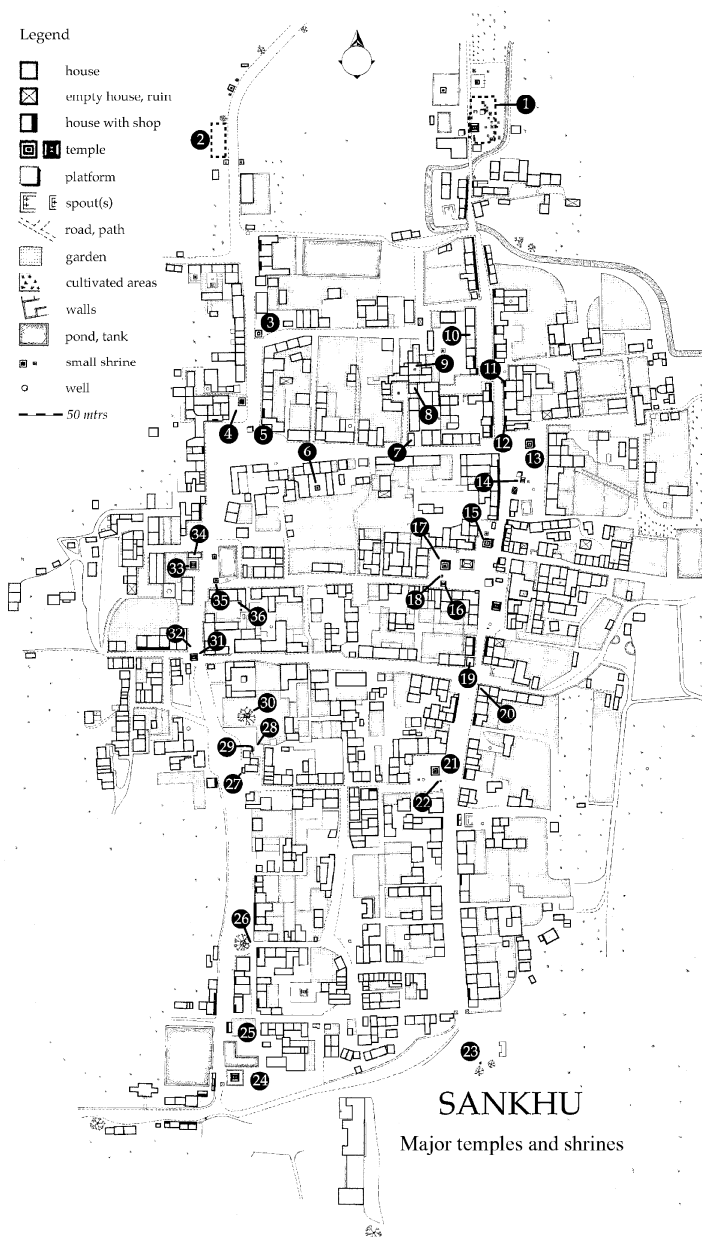
images of Viṣṇu are placed. A dying person is laid down on a *brahmanāl*, a stone slab with an image of Viṣṇu, and holy water is poured over their feet just before their death. It is believed that Lord Viṣṇu helps the dying person to take their last breath peacefully, and then grants them a place in heaven.

### Gods, goddesses, temples and religious sites

Kirkparick, a European visitor to Nepal in the nineteenth century said: “there are as many temples as there are houses and as many idols as there are men.” (Kirkpatrick 1975:150). For both Hindu and Buddhist Newars, gods and goddesses populate the universe. They consider every single stone lying on the street as one or another image of a god or a goddess. They also invoke all these deities or offer them *pūjā* on one or another occasion. In Sankhu, the most important religious site for both Hindu and Buddhist Newars is Gumbāhāḥ, the sanctuary of Vajrayoginī, located at the edge of Gumbāhāḥ forest to the north of the town. Every quarter of Sankhu has a number of images of gods and goddesses. Like the image of Gaṇeśa, certain other deities are also present in every quarter. It is also normal to find several copies of the same god or goddess in a quarter.

One prominent god in Sankhu is Bhīmīlvaham (lit. good stone), who is present in the form of a special stone. At least one such Bhīmīlvaham can be found in every quarter of the town. Their sizes vary from less than one metre to a few metres and they are rectangular in shape. The biggest is situated close to the Mahādevadhvakā gate and is about  $2.5 \times 3$  m. Usually Bhīmīlvahams are stone slabs lying in the street. People avoid stepping on such stones. Some worship them as Bhimsen, and others worship them as Bhairava. Their real identities are not clear. The Bhīmīlvāham in Sālkhā situated next to the quarter’s Gaṇeśa image has three inscriptions. One, dated AD 1644 (NS 764), tells of the installation of a statue of the god Trivikrama; the next, dated AD 1763 (NS 883), mentions the restoration of a platform. The third, dated to AD 1845 (NS 965), is on the tympanum just above the Bhīmīlvāham, and mentions its offering to Bhima Bhairava. It makes clear that Bhīmīlvāham used to be called both Bhima and Bhairava. One stone at the crossroads of the Sālkhā quarter is called *gvaralvaham*, and people believe that if anybody slips and falls on this stone they will instantly die, or will at least be confronted with problems.

In Sankhu only a few deities have their own temple. The others have their statues in the open air. Most are represented by stone images, which are placed either on an elevation decorated with brick or stone layers, or simply on the ground.



Map 6

**Major temples and shrines indicated in 6:**

1. Mahādev temple, images of other deities and Mahādeva pond at Mahādevadvākā square
2. Dhomlā Māhādev temple and other images of deities at the Dhomlā Māhādev square
3. Viṣṇu temple
4. Sarasvatī temple
5. Dhomlā Gaṇeśa
6. Nāsaḥ *dyo*, the god of dance and music and a Buddhist Cibhā
7. Karuṇāmaya at the Lasakuphalcā
8. Vajrācārya's *āgaṃ dyochem* with a processional statue of goddess Vasundharā
9. Mūcuka, the main monastery of the Vajrācāryas priests in Sankhu with images of Buddha (*caitya*)
10. Balampu, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa god house and Rājopādhyāy residence
11. Gaṇeśa shrines at the Vāphale sub-quarter
12. Sālkha tvāḥ Gaṇeśa, Bhairava and Bhimlvāhaṃ as Brahmāyaṇī, one of the *māṭṛkā* in the town
13. Buddha *caitya* next to Viṣṇu statue at the centre of Sālkha quarter
14. Temple of Kṛṣṇa and place of singing devotional songs (Rāmjāpuli)
15. Images of Lakṣmī and Nārāyaṇa
16. Aji *dyo* (Mahālakṣmī), one of the eight *māṭṛkā* inside the town
17. Viśvarupa (Nārāyaṇa)
18. Calākhu Tvāḥ Gaṇeśa
19. Dugahiti Tvāḥ Gaṇeśa
20. *Bhajanchem* with an image of Kṛṣṇa
21. Kṛṣṇa temple
22. Suntol Tvāḥ Gaṇeśa
23. Jaybali *dyo*, one of the eight *māṭṛkā*.
24. Bhaudhvākā Bhagavatī temple, one of the eight *māṭṛkā*
25. Taleju temple
26. Vasimāko *dyo*
27. Ipātvāḥ Gaṇeśa
28. Ipātvāḥ Nāsaḥ *dyo*
29. Buddha *caitya*
30. Nārāyaṇ Temple under a pipal tree
31. Imātvāḥ Gaṇeśa temple with Kumārī, one of the eight *māṭṛkā*, Bhagavatī, Draupadi
32. Śiva-Pārvatī



33. The temple of Bhimsen with Draupadī and Nahakul
34. Pukhulāchi Tvāḥ Gaṇeśa
35. Anantalingeśvara temple
36. Pukhulāchi Tvāḥ Nāsaḥ *dyo*

Some are without any recognisable shape, but are nevertheless regarded as one god or goddess or another. Round shaped stones in the niches of walls represent Nāsaḥ *dyo*. There are only four Nāsaḥ *dyo* in Sankhu: in Ipātol, Pukhulāchī, Dhumlā and Sālkhā. The Nāsaḥ *dyo* in Sālkha is situated in the residential area of the Dyolā, and is worshipped exclusively by them.

Some of the temples that collapsed during the major earthquake of 1934 have never been reconstructed, such as that of Viṣṇu, whose image is still standing at the centre of the Sālkhā quarter. This Viṣṇu statue is believed to help pregnant women in delivering children, so they worship him by smearing cooking oil on it. Beneath the statue of this Viṣṇu there is an inscription dated AD 1899 (NS 1019). Other temples that were repaired lost their original architectural form. Apart from the temples at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, the only remaining Newar-style two-roofed pagoda in the vicinity of the town is the temple of Mahādev. One of the most important gods in Sankhu, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is kept on the first floor of the residence of a Newar Brahmin at Balampu. The places for singing devotional songs (*bhajanchem* or *bhajanghar*), with statues of Kṛṣṇa are also religiously important places in Sankhu. The Suṃtol, Sālkhā, Calākhu and Dugāhiti *bhajanchem* contain statues of Kṛṣṇa, so they are also called Kṛṣṇa temple (Kṛṣṇa *degah*). The one-roofed temple of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇ is one of the newer temples in Sankhu.

A stone inscription inscribed below the statue of Lakṣmīnārāyaṇ is dated AD 1910 (NS 1030). Another important temple in the Calākhu quarter is the shrine of Aji *dyo* of the eight mother goddesses (*māṭṛkā*) who is also called Mahālakṣmī. The wooden frame of its roof rests on four wooden pillars and it has a rectangular shape of about 2 × 3 m. It is a one-storey temple facing west. It has a rectangular stone of about one metre at the centre representing the goddess Aji *dyo*, and a tympanum is placed over the stone. An inscription on the back of the tympanum tells us that it was offered in AD 1423 (NS 543). An inscription on a ridge beam tells that they were installed on the tenth day of the dark half of Māgha month AD 1692 (NS 812). A copper plate attached to another of the beams is dated AD 1896 (NS 1016).

Other significant temples in the town include the Bhagavatī temple and the Taleju temples in the Ipātol quarter. The Bhagavatī temple in Sankhu

does not have a pagoda structure. In 1965 it was reconstructed in a west-facing rectangular-shaped dome of 3 × 4 m of cement and concrete. Vārāhī, one of the eight *māṭrkā* in the town, is also located in this temple. The Taleju temple was destroyed during the 1934 earthquake, but then was later repaired. Its top used to be in a pagoda style, while its lower part looked like an ordinary house. In the 1980s it was reconstructed. It now has two floors and, except for the three pinnacles on its top, its shape can be compared to a two-storeyed house. The Gaṇeśa temple in Ipātol is a one-roofed pagoda reconstructed only in the 1980s. The people of this quarter also use it as a place for singing devotional songs (*bhajan*).

The Gaṇeśa-temple in Iṃlā is a one-roofed temple. It has images of Gaṇeśa, Bhagavatī, Draupatī and Kumārī, and one hole dedicated to the goddess Vajrayoginī. As one of the *māṭrkā*, Kumārī is important to all the people of Sankhu. She is considered to be a fearsome goddess. This had been a two-storeyed temple before the 1934 earthquake. The Nārāyaṇ temple under the pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*) in Iṃlā is also important. It is given its structure by the roots of a huge pipal tree standing over it. A small passage makes it possible for a person to creep inside. It has stone images of Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī.

A statue of Ardhanārīśvara, or the half-male and half-female god considered to be half-Śiva and half-Pārvatī, stands against the walls of Laykuphalcā in the palace grounds of Iṃlā quarter.

### **Dhoṃlādhvākā Mahādeva**

Dhoṃlādhvākā Mahādev is another religious complex in Sankhu. This one-storeyed Mahādev temple with a Śiva idol, is constructed of stone and is one of the most attractive temples of the town. However, a pipal tree growing on the top of the temple cracked its walls, and it is now in a dilapidated condition. It is believed that a pipal represents the god Viṣṇu, so no-one will cut or remove the tree. Viṣṇu (*Mādhava*),<sup>24</sup> Gaṇeśa and Hanumāna are other images at this site. A stone tap is situated a few steps below the surface and to the west, and people of Dhoṃlā quarter use the ground near it as an open latrine. A rest place (*phalcā*) situated here collapsed a long time ago, and has never been repaired. The water channel flowing along this site is considered sacred, so people take their morning baths here. Along the water channel, a few steps north of the Mahādev complex, is another pipal tree at the bottom of which is a statue of Viṣṇu.

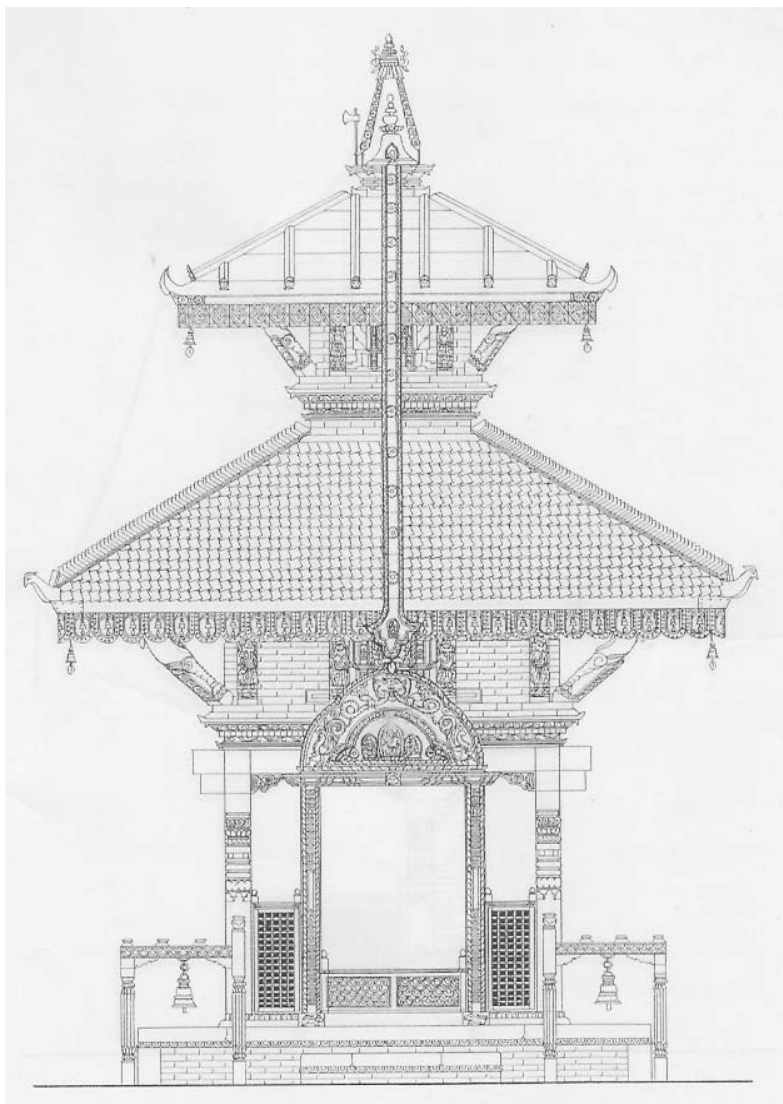


Plate 8: A sketch of the Imlā Ganeśa temple before the 1934 earthquake destroyed it. The FOS has developed this architectural design of the temple based on the memory of the elderly people of the locality who remember the original structure of the temple (2001).

The Jogi claim that the statue of Gorakhanāth was once situated at this location, but was carried away by the people of Dhalamko sub-quarter, only to be established at Śālinadī.

There is not as much importance attached to as Sālkhā Mahādeva, which is older. The only inscription found in the Dhomlā Mahādeva square is on the front wall of the Śiva temple – dated AD 1699 (NS 819) and written in the Newar language and in the Newar script. It tells that the temple and its Śiva, Mādhava and Hanumān statues were installed by six Bhāro brothers of the Dhomlā quarter, and also mentions the land endowment made to run a *guthi* and the *guthi*'s tasks.<sup>25</sup>

### **Sālkhā Mahādevadvākā square**

The Sālkhā Mahādevadvākā square, with the Mahādev temple and its Śiva shrine (phallus), is one of the most sacred religious sites in Sankhu. The main shrine of Śiva is located in the middle of the ground floor of a two-storeyed temple. This shrine is also known as Jyotirlingeśvara, the self-emanated light of Śiva. The Svasthānī has it that Jyotirlingeśvara emerged when one of the parts of the corpse of Satyadevī dropped on this spot.

The Svasthānī goes on to narrate that Satyadevī's father, Dakṣaprajāpati, did not invite her husband, Śiva, to a great sacrificial ceremony. She was so upset that she committed self-immolation in the sacrificial fire her father had organised. Maddened by the death of his wife, Śiva carried her dead body on his shoulders all around the world. Gradually her corpse decomposed, and the body parts fell down to the earth. Wherever they fell, Śiva phallus emerged.

Like Paśupati and Guhyaśvarī, the Jyotirlingeśvara is also regarded as a sacred pilgrimage site in Sankhu. As mentioned above, many people in Sankhu perform Śrāddha, an annual food offering by relatives to their ancestors, near this temple. A small water channel called Sundarīgḥāt, which runs close by, is also considered holy. Some take their morning baths here, and discard food (*pinḍa*) to the ancestors into the water channel after the completion of Śrāddha.

In the past, a Newar Bhaṭṭa Brahmin used to perform priestly tasks at the temple as well as looking after the building. After his death in the mid 1960s, no successor took over his duties for a few decades. A few years ago another Bhaṭṭa Brahmin from Cāmgū came to take over his task, but he then left the job, as it was not sufficiently well paid. Recently, a Parbate Brahmin has taken over the priestly tasks of the temple.



Plate 9: Mahādeva temple, surrounding monuments and water channel before they were restored (1994).

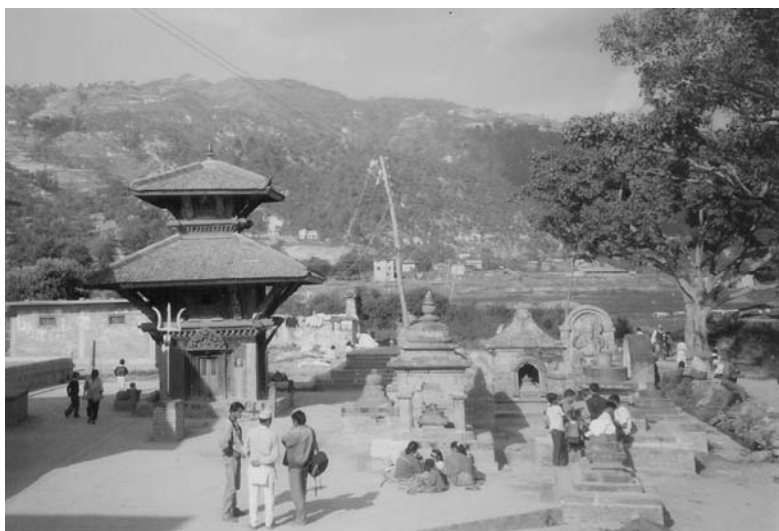


Plate 10: Front view of the area after its restoration in 1997.

He is employed by a descendant of a temple founder to look after one small stone temple of Śiva at the Mahādevadhvākā Square. The Vajrayoginī VDC pays the priest for his duties at the Mahādeva temple. Once a year, on the day of Gunhi punhi, the statue of Jyotirlingeśvara is carried out in procession through the town.

Several inscriptions are scattered around the Mahādeva Square. These are in Newar script, and the language is either Sanskrit, Newar or a combination of the two. Most mention the name of the reigning kings and the individuals who installed certain gods and goddesses or offered certain items to them. With one or two exceptions, all the individuals who made such offerings were from Sankhu. The oldest inscription found in Mahādeva Square is dated AD 1599 (NS 719). It contains a verse of praise to Jotirlinga Bhaṭṭāraka (Śiva) and tells of the installation of a stone image of the goddess Bhagavatī with the god Maheśvara. The language of the inscription is Sanskrit. The second oldest is dated AD 1623 (NS 743). It is in the Newar language and tells of the installation of an Umāmaheśvara. An inscription dated AD 1635 (NS 755) is in the Newar language and tells that the construction of the Jyotirlingeśvara temple was completed and a golden *kalaśa* was offered to it on the fourth day of the bright half of Baiśākha. Whether the temple was constructed for the first time or was only reconstructed or renovated is unclear. An inscription written in Newar and dated AD 1691 (NS 811) tells of the installation of a Pāspati Mahādeva. Similarly, another Newar inscription dated AD 1692 (NS 812) tells of the installation of a Mādhava Deva. An inscription dated AD 1732 (NS 852) in mixed Sanskrit and Newar informs us that the golden pinnacle of the Jotirlingeśvar was repaired and reinstalled. Epigraphist Shankarman Rajavamsi recorded five inscriptions from the Mahādev Square that I did not find in my survey of 1997. All five inscriptions were in Newar script and language. One says that the Sarasvatī statue in the square was installed in AD 1687 (NS 809), another that a Paśupati was installed in AD 1735 (NS 855) (Rajvamsi 1963:67, 81). Another, the date of which he could not read, belongs to the reign of the Shah king Ranabhadur (1777–99) (Rajvamsi 1963:93). This inscription was found on the wall of a rest place situated at the Mahādevadhvākā square, probably the one that collapsed recently. A further inscription was dated AD 1801 (NS 921) (Rajvamsi 1963:93). The last that he found was on a wall and was dated AD 1843 (NS 963) (Rajvamsi 1963:119).

Jyotirlingeśvara is popular as Mahādeva in Sankhu, and people call the whole area of the temple the place of Mahādev. In addition to the temple, there are numerous other statues around the Mahādeva square, including a life size Gaṇeśa, Viṣṇu with Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī, Bhimsen, a sleeping

Viṣṇu (Bhuijasinārāyaṇa), Rādhā and Kṛṣṇa, Satyanārāyaṇa, Triratna, Mināga, Sitalā māju, Caturmukhī Śiva, a small stone temple of Śiva, Cāmuṇḍā with a troupe of Aṣṭamāṭṛkā considered to be one of the eight *māṭṛkā* inside the town, Śiva-Pārvaṭī and several other images of Śiva. Beyond the main temple with its Śiva shrine, there are at least fourteen other stone images of Śiva scattered around this square. It is believed that the Śaiva people built these shrines. Mahādeva pond is another sacred spot in this square. Several stone inscriptions found in Mahādevadhvākā square make it clear that during the time of the installation of these temples and the images of the gods, various religious associations (*guthi*) were also established to ensure their maintenance. Unfortunately, almost all of them have disappeared due to the dispossession of the land that provided them with income.



Plate 11: An old man taking a round of shrines as a part of his morning duties (September 1997).

Community rituals, festivals and individual worship went on as before, but against the background of the overall decay of the holy site itself. The pond became polluted and then dried up; the pagoda came near to collapse and some of its wooden carvings were stolen. Other statues, sculptures and inscriptions lost their pedestals, fell down and were abandoned. It became abundantly clear that the old system of maintenance did not work any

more and had to be replaced. Thanks to the NGO “Friends of Sankhu” (FoS), which took the initiative of restoring the sacred site in 1997/98, the square is once again in good shape. The Friends of Sankhu received financial support from the Royal Netherlands Consulate and the Netherlands-Nepal Association (*Vereniging Nederland-Nepal*) and some generous individuals.

The two-roofed Mahādeva temple in Sankhu is a magnificent example of a Newar pagoda-style temple.<sup>26</sup> A special kind of tile (*āypā*) is used on the roofs, and its walls are built with traditional bricks known as *daci apā*. The temple has a square shape and is surrounded by four walls. On the ground floor it has four wooden doors facing the four main directions, above each is a semicircular wooden tympanum decorated with figures.

Only the south-facing gate is open as an entrance to the temple for the public. Inside the temple, at the centre of the ground floor, is a stone phallus (*liṅga*) attached to a female organ (*yoni*). Devotees worship the shrine by offering water, flowers, coloured powders, vegetables and other items. Wooden frames and struts support the roofs of the temple, which are diagonally connected to the temple walls by wooden struts, carved with various religious images. Twelve struts support the first roof from the ground. Those on each corner are carved with an animal figure. The eight at the centre of the walls depict Bhairava, the god of death. Each of the Bhairava is in a different mood. He is considered to be one of the forms of Śiva himself. At the bottom of each strut are images of copulating human couples. Such erotic symbols are common in temples in Nepal, especially Śaiva temples. Some believe such symbols are carved to protect the temple from lightning, others consider them to express tantric values. Many also believe they were a way of educating people about sex.<sup>27</sup> A wooden window is attached below the roof, in the middle of each wall. The top roof and walls are smaller in size (see picture), but similar in structure, and the wooden struts are decorated with different figures. A brass pinnacle is fixed to the top of the temple.

### **Vāṃdā *dyo*, the rain-beaten goddess**

Situated at about 2 km south-east of the town is the temple of the goddess Vāṃdā *dyo*. Her seat is at the centre of a walled compound and her image faces south. The southern part of the compound is constructed as a rest place, which visitors can also use for feasting. She is also called Vārāhī and is considered to be one of the eight *mātrkā* around the town. However, most know her only as the goddess in the rain or the Vāṃdā *dyo*, as a roof does not cover her seat. She is usually visited on Tuesdays and



Saturdays, to pray for good crops. It is believed that she protects crops from hailstorms or pigs, or alternatively she may destroy crops if she gets angry.

She is one of the most fearsome goddesses, because she is also considered to be the trainer of witches. People believe that women visit her to learn witchcraft deep in the night. Stories are told of husbands being turned into brooms and sacrificed to the goddess Vāṃdā *d̥yo* by the new witches on the final day of their training. It is thought that six months after such an incident, those husbands meet a real death. Witches are considered capable of burning their own fingers and of flying from one place to another. They are believed to suck blood from human bodies, though they cannot be witnessed. Witches are feared, and must not be displeased because they can cause enormous trouble, including death. However, it is thought that the Vāṃdā *d̥yo* can protect one from their black magic. Therefore, it is deemed prudent to keep the goddess pleased by worshipping her regularly. Tuesdays and Saturdays are thought the best days to worship. Vāṃdā *d̥yo* punishes those witches who misuse their spells, while rewarding those who please her. A traditional healer (*vaidya*) told me there are many witches in every quarter in Sankhu.

### Salaṃkhvāḥ *d̥yo*

About 2 km south-west of the town stands the temple of Salaṃkhvāḥ *d̥yo*. Her seat is on open ground at the southern side of the top of Salaṃguṃ forest. She is facing west, and to her south is a rest place. As Kumārī, she is also considered to be one of the eight mother goddesses surrounding the town. People visit and worship her on many different occasions, and at least once a year. She is considered a benevolent goddess. The story goes that the Salaṃguṃ forest was one full of all varieties of fruits. People in Sankhu could go to the forest and picked up as many of them as they needed. However, the condition for picking fruit was never to collect more than was needed. One day, a greedy man went to the forest, and took away much more than he needed, and this angered the goddess. From that day onwards, the fruit trees in the forest stopped bearing. When the greedy man realised his fault, it was too late. However, it is still believed that if one is really poor and hungry and walks through the forest and prays to the goddess Salaṃkhvāḥ *d̥yo* for her help, she will still bestow food and wealth on that person.

## The structure of settlement in Sankhu

High castes live in the central areas of Newar settlements, while the edge or outer rim of cities, towns and villages is reserved for the low and impure castes. Although the mixing of different castes in the same locality has begun, this traditional social structure has not been fully abandoned.

Low and impure or unclean castes like the Dyolā or Po, the Nāy and the Doṃ (but not the Jogi) were supposed to build their houses outside the city walls. In Sankhu, the cleaners (Dyolā) and the guardians of the shrines of the mother goddesses (*piṭha*), who are considered to be the lowest caste, are concentrated in the outer rim of the town. They are settled at the north-eastern extremity of the Sālkhā quarter. In the past, the Dyolās were only allowed to build houses with thatched roofs and a single storey. In Sankhu, a Dyolā family recently broke this tradition by building a three-storey house. The butchers' (Nāy) houses in Sankhu are concentrated in three quarters: in the mid western edge of the town in Pukulāchi quarter, the north-eastern edge in Sālkhā quarter and the south-eastern edge in Suṃtol quarter. These areas are also known as *nāygaḥ*, the butchers' sheds. Traditionally, butchers too were only allowed to build one-storey houses, but they have long ignored this rule. In Pukhulāchi quarter, among the houses of the Nāy, lives a Kami family the Parvate impure caste of blacksmith. The houses of the Doṃ (*dholak*, drummers), another unclean low caste, are mainly located at the mid eastern edge of the town in Dugāhiti quarter.

Although the Jogis are an impure and unclean caste, their houses are inside the town boundaries, mainly concentrated in the mid western part of the town inside the Iṃlā quarter. In the past, the Jogis used to live in the rest houses (*sataḥ*) or god's rest houses (*dyo sataḥ*), but now only one family lives in such a house. In the last twenty years the majority of Jogi have moved into their own houses.<sup>28</sup> Some low-caste people, such as the trumpeters (Duim), who were once considered impure and unclean, are no longer considered so. They were supposed to build their houses only outside the city boundary, i.e. *dhvākhām pine* (right outside the city gates), but the Duim, like the butchers, have long ignored this injunction.<sup>29</sup> They are settled in the south of the town, around the Bhaudhvākā (bride's gate), and in the north-east, near Mahādevadvākā, also known as *sī dhvākā* (the funeral gate).

The Śreṣṭhas are the largest group in Sankhu, and their houses are spread throughout the town. They have the majority of houses in every quarter. The Jyāpus, the farmers, are the second largest, and their houses are mainly found in three quarters: Calākhu, Dugāhiti and Suṃtol. The

Sāymī or oil pressers mainly inhabit two different areas in Ipātol quarter. The Prajāpati (or potters) and the Malla Khacarā or Thaku Malla (“mixed descents”, who claim to be descendants of Malla kings and began to be called Malla) are concentrated in the Cakhumkyaba sub-quarter of Ipātol. The Buddhist priests, or Vajrācāryas, are settled mainly in Dhomlā quarter, where they are concentrated in the Mulam sub-quarter. It is in Mulam that their secret place of worship (*āgaṃchem*) and god-house of Vasundharā are located. Two main monasteries (*bāhāh*) of the Vajrācārya are also located in this sub-quarter. It is believed that they originated from the forest monastery (Gumbāhāh) of the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, but then later moved down to the town. All Vajrācārya of Sankhu and many Vajrācārya from Kathmandu and Patan consider their forefathers to be migrants from Gumbāhāh.

A separate courtyard called Balampu, with two houses, is reserved for the Newar Hindu Brahmin priests in the Vāphalcā sub-quarter of Sālkhā. It is likely that Balampu is a corruption of the Sanskrit phrase *Brahmin puri*, or the place of Brahmins. The Brahmin priests in Sankhu come from Patan, the second largest Newar city of the Kathmandu Valley. At present, two Brahmin families live in Sankhu permanently, and one of them has built their house in the Balampu courtyard.

There are only a few families of castes such as the Śākya (household monks and goldsmiths), Kau (blacksmiths), Bhā or Kāranjit (funeral priests), Nau (barbers) or Gathu (gardeners) in Sankhu. Their houses are not numerous, but the tendency to live close to others of the same caste category is apparent with them also. There is only one Citrakār (painter) family in Sankhu. Their house is located in the Suṃtol quarter among the Shrestha houses. Three Nāju or horn blower families live in the Dugāhiti quarter.<sup>30</sup> In the past they were considered to be an unclean caste, but they are no longer considered so. Some of the Sankhu Nāju families live across the river Śālinadī. Even though the Nāju caste in Sankhu considers itself a Newar caste, their marriage relations continue to be with Kunwar, a caste of the Parvate community.

The impure and untouchable castes are not supposed to build their houses in the central areas of the town, or at least they are not supposed to build their houses close to high-caste Newar houses. However, a Jogi house has been built sharing a wall with a Śreṣṭha house in Iṃlā quarter, and in Pukhulāchī quarter, two Nāy families have their houses sharing walls with Śreṣṭhas. These are recent developments, that have taken place only within the last three or four decades. The 1964 legal code has equalised all castes, but in Sankhu the so-called unclean castes are still not in a position to buy or build their houses in the quarters of high-caste

families. In the big Newar cities, like Kathmandu and Patan, such restrictions have, however, been lifted socially as well as legally.

## House architecture

The architectural designs of traditional houses are more or less similar in every Newar settlement.<sup>31</sup> The houses that survived the 1934 earthquake retain their old structure. Baked and unbaked bricks, clay and wood are the elementary materials used to build houses. The outer walls are built with baked bricks and the inner layers are built with unbaked bricks. As one bricklayer (*dakami*) explained, this is to keep the house cool in summer and warm in winter. Many houses are also built with baked bricks bedded in clay. Wood is another substantial element of Newar houses. It is extensively used to support floors and roofs, and to make windows and doors. Traditional Newar houses are usually built with two to five storeys. A central wall (*dathu amga*) is an essential part of the house, and is believed to make it strong. It also divides into two halves, from ground to upper floors, but the top floor (*baiga*) does not contain the central wall. The rear part of the ground floors (*chemdi*) are not used for living purposes, but either as stores or the stable for buffaloes, goats, chickens, dogs or other domestic animals. If the house is situated along the roadside of a main market, then the front parts of the ground floor are often used as shops. Often, a courtyard behind a house is built as a solid-waste disposal site (*sāgā*). Dirty water and rubbish are discharged into such courtyards, which are linked with the main sewage system of the town. Once a year, the solid matter from such courtyards is carried away to the fields to be used as fertiliser.

Traditionally, Newar houses have no toilets; and open places are used as latrine (*malā*). In Sankhu, building a toilet as part of the house started in the late 1960s, but many open latrines are still in use in the town. People still do not like having a toilet inside their house, as they think it impure. In those houses where toilets are, they are to be found either in a corner on the ground floor or in an adjoining garden. Depending upon the availability of space, one may have a garden (*kyaba*) near the house for growing vegetables and flowers.

A Newar house may have more than one gate, but the only ritually one is its main gate (*mūlukhā*), and the main door of a house carries various religious symbols. For all ritual activities – worshipping of gods and goddesses outside the house, welcoming a new bride into the house or giving away daughters in marriage, or carrying away dead bodies from the house – only the main gate is used. Newar people consider an entrance to a

house to possess a god and a goddess<sup>32</sup> that chase away evil spirits. To carve divine serpents (*nāga*) on the top of a main gate is also a tradition. It is believe the *nāga* will protect the house from the entry of evil spirits. Although these traditions are no longer followed strictly, we can still see pictures of *nāgas* being attached above the entrance of many houses on the day of Nāgapañcamī every year. In addition, every morning, those who carry out the worship of the Gaṇeśa must also worship the main gate before entering the house on the way back from the Gaṇeśa temple.



Plate 12: A typical Newar house in the Suntol quarter of Sankhu (photo courtesy Colin Rosser, mid-1950s).

The first floor (*mātaṃ*) contains a number of rooms (according to the space available), but most especially a room to receive visitors. Such a reception parlour is bigger than other rooms in the house. Nowadays, such rooms are also called a *baithak* or living room. These are used as places to recite religious stories, such as Svasthānī during the month of Māgha (January/February). Many family members usually gather to listen when Svasthānī is recited. On the second floor there are *cvataṃ*, living rooms or bedrooms, for the members of the household. On the same floor are the main storage rooms for grain (*kuthi*) and a place to store daily necessities (*dhuku*).

Usually, third or top floors (*baigaḥ*) are used for dining. A wood-burning stove (*bhūthu*) built of bricks plastered with clay and cow dung, is

found in a corner. No-one other than family members and their relatives are supposed to step into the cooking space of a Newar house. Among some conservative Śreṣṭha families, the cooking space is not supposed to be stepped on even by their own relatives. However, such rules have been relaxed in many Newar houses during the recent decades. A place of worship (*pūjā kuthi*) is made in a corner of the third floor, or on the fourth floor if there is one. Very few Newar people build houses with a fourth (*pyatam*) or fifth (*nyātam*) floor. Wooden staircases are used to ascend and descend from one floor to another. People believe that such a staircase must contain seven steps for reasons of auspiciousness.

In many, though not all, households' lineage (*digu dyo*) and secret family (*āgam dyo*) deities are placed in the most secret room called *āgamkvathā*. Depending upon the structure and the space available in a house, *āgamkvathā* can be on the second, the third or fourth floor. This is the most secret and sacred space in a Newar household. In some cases, only those members of a house who have undergone ritual initiation (*dīkṣā*) have access to *āgam* rooms, though in other cases all members of the household are allowed into the *āgam*. In our own family, no-one procured any *dīkṣā*, but all its members are allowed into the *āgam*, including in-married women and newborn children. However, once the daughters are married, they are generally excluded from the *āgam* of their own parental homes forever. Although they lose the right of access to their ancestor *āgam*, they obtain such rights at their in-married homes. In a few cases, though, out-married daughters do retain access to their parental *āgam*.

The roofs of Newar houses slope on two sides, creating an attic on the top floor. Traditionally, tiles (*āypā*) were the main protection against rain. One or two holes (*bhau pvā*, lit. cat hole), just big enough to put one's head through, are made on one side of a roof for light and ventilation. Such a hole is also used to offer food to the goddess of the crossroads (*chvāsaḥajimā*). Meals are prepared and a small portion of it is thrown through the *bhau pvā* every morning and evening. In most Newar houses, offering food to the goddess of the crossroads (*chvāsaḥajimā*) and to the crows are compulsory morning and evening rituals before food is distribution to human beings.

To build odd numbers of windows on each floor of a house is a standard tradition. People believe that it is inauspicious even to look at a house having an even number of windows. Depending upon the size of a house, one can put three, five, seven or more windows. To attach lattice windows (*tikijhyāh*) to a house also used to be a common practice. The generally decorate the first floors of traditional Newar houses.

In the past decades many houses in Sankhu have been rebuilt or reconstructed, but the owners no longer followed the traditional norms of house building. Wooden materials, mud and unbaked or baked bricks are now being replaced by combinations of iron rods, concrete and cement. These newly built houses soon had more storeys than the old ones. Six to nine storeys became normal in such new buildings. The roofs are clad with either zinc sheets or rods, concrete and cement. As the production of traditional bricks with a smooth surface, called *cikamapā*, has almost stopped, so-called Chinese bricks are now frequently used to build the front walls of houses, to give them a good appearance. The replacement of traditional windows with glass ones has also become common. Old-style Newar houses are becoming rare and rarer. During the past three decades more than fifty private houses following Western designs have been built in Sankhu. Only a few poor people are still seen building their houses in the traditional way.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, attention has been given to the structure, pantheon, settlement, art and architecture of the town. For this purpose, material related to its shape, organisation in quarters, city gates, pantheon, settlement and building structure, art and architecture were presented. Wherever possible, I have discussed relevant inscriptions to assess the antiquity of monuments and also to provide facts on the *guthi* established to look after them, their income and their patrons. It was not possible to discuss all the inscriptions in detail.

From the discussion of the geographical position of the town, it can be concluded that it was constructed according to ancient planning principles. Four main gates, main roads (*pradakṣiṇāpatha*) inside the town, palace, squares, platforms, settlement of people etc. are all arranged to give sacredness to the town. Human settlements tend to maintain a traditional structure, thereby demarcating certain boundaries for certain castes. The settlements of “impure” or low caste people and “pure” or high caste people are clearly separated from each other, and the traditional demarcations have changed little, despite the new legal code to equalise the castes.

From the discussion of the architecture of the town, it became obvious that the majority of the people in present day Sankhu are not aware of the cultural and artistic importance of traditional architecture. They are more inclined to accept Western designs than their own. Two factors play a vital role: firstly, the high cost of maintaining traditional architecture; secondly,

ignorance about the value of the traditional methods of construction. Finally, a brief discussion attempts to throw light on how people value their town from a religious viewpoint. People's emotional attachment to Sankhu is intensely connected to its religious significances, such as its gods and goddesses, feasts and festivals, which give them feeling of truly belonging to the town.

In this ancient Newar town, where all possible modern facilities have recently become available, and yet where traditional culture is still alive, we can see clear conflicts between the old and the new. The new generation, in particular, eager to embrace global culture, does not see the value of ancient traditions. Although Sankhu has not yet lost its ancient appearance, in terms of its buildings and settlement pattern, it is difficult to predict what it will look like if the present trend of imitating Western styles of building continues. A few young people who are members of the Friends of Sankhu, a local NGO, are exceptions in this regard. Their active involvement in the restoration of the ancient religious sites of the Mahādevadvākā square, the Vajrayoginī temple and traditional shelters (*sataḥ and phalcā*) show that historical awareness among the new generation is not completely lost. With the restoration of these historical and religious sites, more people in Sankhu have begun to realise the value of their rich traditions and culture.



## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER FIVE

### NAMES OF THE DEITIES IN THE DIFFERENT QUARTERS OF SANKHU

#### In the Dhoṃlā quarter

1. Dhoṃlādhvākā Māhā *dya* in a stone temple
2. Mādhav Nārāyaṇa (a form of Viṣṇu, that was with two small statues, Lakṣmī and Saraśvatī at its right and left, but both were stolen)
3. Sarasvatī
4. Gaṇeśa
5. Hanumāna
6. Vasimā Viṣṇu
7. Svāmlā bhagaban *dya*
8. Gasicā bhagaban *dya*
9. Phisale Nārāyaṇ *dya*
10. Saraśvatī
11. Gaṇeśa
12. Buddhist *caitya*
13. Buddhist *caitya* (both believed to be from Licchavi times and called Aśoka *caitya*)
14. Nāsaḥ *dya*, the god of dance and music
15. Indrāyaṇī, one of the eight *mātrkā* at Ombāhāl
16. Buddha *caitya* inside the Nāsaḥcuka square
17. Kṛṣṇa
18. Lukumā *dya*
19. Mucuka bhagavan *dya*
20. Vasundharā
21. Lasakuphalcā Karuṇāmaya
22. Duccheṃ Bhagavān Buddha
23. Mucuka bhagavan
24. Vajrācārya āgaṃ *dya* with a processional statue of Basuṃdharā

**In the Sālkhā quarter**

1. Mahādev temple and other images at Mahādevadvākā square (Mahādeva pond)
2. A life size Gaṇeśa
3. Viṣṇu with Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī
4. Sarasvatī
5. Bhimsen
6. Bhuijasi Nārāyaṇ
7. Rādhākṛṣṇa
8. Satyanārāyaṇ
9. Triratna
10. Mināga
11. Sitalā māju
12. Caturmukhī Śiva, a small stone temple of Śiva
13. Cāmuṇḍā, with a troupe of Aṣṭamātrkā, considered to be one of the eight *matrkās* inside the town
14. Śiva-Pārvatī and several other scattered shrines of Śiva: besides the main temple and Śiva shrine there are fourteen other large and small shrines of Śiva scattered around this square
15. A stone image of a Gaṇeśa at Mahādevadvākā gate
16. Tagva Bhimlvaham

**In the Calākhū quarter**

1. Abbācheṃ *dyo*
2. Lakṣmī Nārāyaṇ
3. Svamha devī
4. Buddha
5. Dhalamko Bhimlvaham
6. Aji *dyo* (Mahālakṣmī), one of the eight *mātrkā* inside the town Licchavi times.

17. Mādhavanārāyaṇ at Balampu
18. An image of Viṣṇu inside the Balampu courtyard
19. Bhagavatī image at Candrabhakta's courtyard
20. Bhagavan *dyo* at Vapibāhāḥ
21. Gaṇeśa at Vāpha sub-quarter
22. Sālkhātvaḥ Gaṇeśa
23. Bhairava and Bhimlvaham as Brahmāyaṇī, one of the *matrkā* in the town,
24. Two Buddha Caityas inside the Nanicā courtyard
25. Gvaralvaham
26. Nārāyaṇ statue at the centre of Sālkha quarter
26. Buddha *caitya* at the centre of Sālkha quarter
27. Sālkhā Kṛṣṇa in the Rāmājāpuli *bhajan* place
28. Stone images at the stone spouts (*gāhiti*)
29. Bhairava at the Dyolā sub-quarter
30. Gaṇeśa at the Dyolā sub-quarter
31. Nāsaḥ *dyo*, at the Dyolā sub-quarter

7. Calākhutvaḥ Gaṇeśa
8. Viśvarupa Nārāyaṇa
9. Kṛṣṇa at Calākhū *bhajancheṃ*
10. Nārāyaṇ in the temple
11. Bhimlvāham
12. Two Buddhist *caitya* beside the well, believed to be from

**In the Dugāhiti quarter**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Gāhiti Garbhanārāyaṇa                        | 6. Maltācuka Bhagavanbāhāḥ               |
| 2. Tvāḥ Gaṇeśa                                  | 7. Kayampvā Bhagaban <i>dyo</i> (Buddha) |
| 3. Kṛṣṇa in the <i>bhajan</i> house             | 8. Sukhi <i>dyo</i>                      |
| 4. Vārāhī (Pha <i>dyo</i> )                     | 9. Bhīmīlvāhaṃ                           |
| 5. Ibicāḥ <i>dyo</i> , one of the <i>mātrkā</i> |  |

**In the Suṃtol quarter**

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| 1. Bhīmīlvāhaṃ                                | 6. Tuṃ <i>dyo</i>                                       |
| 2. Jaybali <i>dyo</i> , another <i>mātrkā</i> | 7. Kṛṣṇa at the <i>bhajan</i> house                     |
| 3. Mahā <i>dyo</i>                            | 8. Jaybali <i>dyo</i> , one of the eight <i>matrkās</i> |
| 4. Tvāḥ Gaṇeśa                                |   |
| 5. Nārāyaṇ <i>dyo</i>                         |   |

**In the Ipātōl quarter**

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Bhaudhvākā Bhagavatī, one of the eight <i>mātrkā</i> s | 6. Nāsaḥ <i>dyo</i>  |
| 2. Taleju temple  | 7. Buddha <i>caitya</i>  |
| 3. Sarasvatī  | 8. Nārāṃ <i>dyo</i> at gāhiti                                      |
| 4. Vasimāko <i>dyo</i>                                    | 9. The processional statue of Kṛṣṇa is kept in an individual house |
| 5. Tvāḥ Gaṇeśa  |  |

**In the Imlā quarter**

- |  |                        |
|--|------------------------|
| 1. The temple of the Imlātvāḥ Gaṇeśa with Bhagavatī, Draupati and Kumārī, one of the eight <i>mātrkā</i> | 3. Lāyku <i>dabū</i>   |
| 2. Vasimānārāyaṇ   | 4. Śiva-Pārvatī        |
|  | 5. Ardhanārīśvara      |
|  | 7. Lukumāhā <i>dyo</i> |

**In the Pukhulāchi quarter**

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| 1. The temple of Bhimsen with Draupati and Nahakul | 6. Māhādev shrine at the centre of the quarter |
| 2. Gaṇeśa  | 7. Mahādeva aside the Pukhulāchī pond          |
| 3. Anantalingeśvara temple                         | 8. Nārāyaṇ <i>dyo</i> at the pond.             |
| 4. Nāsaḥ <i>dyo</i>                                |  |
| 5. Śiva temple                                     |  |

## CHAPTER SIX

### SOCIO-ECONOMIC POSITION OF SANKHU

#### Introduction

Sankhu is known as the town of a thousand houses (“Hajār ghar Sankhu”). Though people in Sankhu, as well as outsiders, still believe that Sankhu contains a thousand houses, from my household survey (1997), it appeared that there were only 789 houses and a total population of 5,340.<sup>1</sup> In this Chapter, the survey results will be discussed in detail.

Sankhu is situated 17 kilometres northeast of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. Small villages and hamlets such as Gāmsulī, Salambuṭār, Bilgoṭh, Kvāthancok, Cugām, Bhulbhū, Ghumārcok, Lapsephedī, Pālubārī and Bisvaṃmarā surround the town. They are considered as belonging to the realm of Sankhu, and therefore they are known by the name Sankhu as well. Bāhun, Kṣetri, Damāi, Sārki and Kāmī inhabit Gāmsulī, Salambuṭār, Bilgoṭh, Kvāthancok, and Bhulbhū, all these castes belonging to Khas or Parvate community or people of hill origin.<sup>2</sup> The Tāmāṅg<sup>3</sup> live in a village of Ghumārcok, while a mixed population of Tāmāṅg, Khas and Newar inhabit Pālubārī, Bisvaṃmarā and Lapsephedī. The Khas speak Khasa-Nepali. The Tāmāṅgs speak Tāmāṅg, a Tibeto-Burmese language. Parvate-speaking settlements spread widely in Kathmandu Valley following the 1769 Gorkhā conquest of the Valley, so they are of relatively recent date compared to the Tāmāṅg and the Newar settlements. Therefore, Sankhu is not only multi-caste, but also multi-ethnic society (*bahujāti*). *Bahujāti* is the word to embrace the minority ethnicities or nationalities that have cultures distinct from the national mainstream within the present-day nation-state. The social organization of the Tāmāṅg and Parvate living in and around Sankhu is far less complicated; besides the untouchables (Sārki, Kāmī, Damāi, Gāine) in the Parvate community, the nationwide Parvate community has a largely homogeneous culture that is determined by the dominant Brahmin and Kṣetri castes. The Tāmāṅg, who, after the Newar, have the most numerous populations in the Sankhu area, do not have a caste system in the common sense of the word, although some clans (*thar*) among them have a higher status than others. Although, these two

major ethnic groups, Tāmāṅg and Khas, geographically surround the town of Sankhu the town itself is entirely populated by the Newars, with the exception of one Kāmī family from the Khas artisan caste and one Tāmāṅg family, which settled there only in 1992.

### Political map of Sankhu

In 1961, the late king Mahendra introduced a partyless Panchayat system called Panchayat, which functioned from the national to the village level. Under this political system, Nepal was divided into fourteen zones, each zone consisting of several districts (in total there were seventy-five districts). Each district was divided into several villages and towns according to the size of their population or geographical area. At the village level these political divisions were called Village Panchayat, at the town level Town Panchayat, at the district level District Panchayat and at the national level National Panchayat. With the introduction of the multi-party system in 1990 the Panchayat began to be called '*Gāuṃ Vikās Samiti*, or Village Development Committee (VDC) at Village level, Municipality (*Nagarpālikā*) at the town or city level, District Development Committee (*Jillā Vikās Samiti*) at the district level, but the overall political structure remained the same. At the top level, the House of Representatives (*Pratinidhi Sabhā*) the Lower House of parliament and the National Assembly (*Rāṣṭriya Sabhā*) have replaced the National Panchayat. During the Panchayat time the country was also divided into five development regions and this demarcation remained unchanged.

Every Village is divided into nine wards and each ward covers a certain area of the Village. A Village Development Committee (VDC) is an elected body of 47 people. The VDC consists of a Chairman, a Vice-Chairman, a ward chairman and four members, which include one woman from each of the nine wards. During the Panchayat time the members were elected individually, but with the introduction of the Multi-party system people are elected according to their party affiliation. The term Panchayat is still widely used for the VDC.

The members of the VDC and of the Municipalities, of a district elect the Chairman, the Vice-Chairman and nine members of a *Jillā Vikās Samiti* or District Development Committee (DDC). Each district is divided into several electoral constituencies according to the size of its population, each of them electing a member of the House of Representatives once every five years. The House of Representatives or the Lower House of Parliament elects some of the members of the Upper House of Parliament or the National Assembly. Some of its members are also elected from five

development regions, while the king nominated other members of this body.

Kathmandu, the largest district of the country has been divided into ten electoral constituencies during the 2008 Constituent Assembly election. Sankhu area belongs to a constituency number two of the Kathmandu district. In addition to a few wards of Kathmandu Municipality, seven VDC are included in the constituency number one: Nānglebhāre, Lapsephedī, Vajrayoginī, Pukhulāchī, Suntol, Indrāyānī, Dāchi and Mulpanī. Although the VDC around Sankhu town are generally known by the name Sankhu, only the major parts of three Village VDCs, i.e., Vajrayoginī, Pukhulāchī and Suntol, constitute Sankhu town. Sankhu, therefore is not a municipality but is divided into three separate parts, each administered by a ‘village’ council. Since 1991 there have been three general elections, two by-elections and an election to the Constituent Assembly (CA). Each time the Communist Party of Nepal, United Marxist-Leninists (CPN UML), the major Communist Party of Nepal, succeeded in having its candidates elected into the parliament, thereby defeating its closest rival candidates from the Nepali Congress, another major political party of Nepal. However, in 2008 Constituent Assembly election, defeating Madhavkumar Nepal, the general secretary and the most powerful man of the CPN UML, the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) succeeded at electing its candidate Jhakkuprasad Suvedi, hitherto unknown person to this area.

Since 1992, the VDCs have experienced only two local elections. On both occasions Rāstriya Prajātantra Party or National Democratic Party (*Rāprapā*)<sup>4</sup> won the majority seats including the posts of Chairman and vice-Chairmanship in Pukhulāchī and Vajrayoginī, while CPN UML succeeded both times in Suntol. The Nepali Congress remained the third influential party in this area.<sup>5</sup> From these election results, it may be concluded that Sankhu is politically divided. The majority of the population (Vajrayoginī and Pukhulāchī VDC) was for the National Democratic Party, while Suntol, the biggest VDC was for CPN UML. Most recently the 2008 CA election the CPN Maoist has shown its strong presence in polls.

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (CBS) Census 1991, the total population of these three VDC's was 10,087: Pukhulāchī 2,879, Vajrayoginī 3,228 and Suntol 3,980. Among them, the Newars dominated with 53.65 %, mainly concentrated inside the town area of these three VDC, the second largest population (26.26 %) were the Khas (Brahmin, Chetrī, Damāi, Kāmī and Sārki) and the third largest were the Tāmāng (20.09 %)- only very few other ethnic groups are to be found inside these

three VDC. Of the surrounding small settlements of Sankhu, Salambutār, Pālubārī and Bisvaṃmarā form part of Suntol VDC; Bilgoṭh and Kvāthancok form part of Pukhulāchī VDC; Bhulbhu and Ghumārcok form part of Vajrayoginī VDC.

### Administrative divisions

Before 1951, during the Rana rule, Sankhu was under the control of a local administrative chief called *dvāre*. The *dvāre* took care of the collection of revenues from land and settled small disputes. In 1951, after the overthrow of the Ranas, Nepal experienced a multi-party democracy for ten years, and the *dvāre* post was suppressed. In 1960, the late king Mahendra banned the multi-party system and introduced a partyless Panchayat system. During the thirty years period of the Panchayat system, Sankhu was divided into three Panchayats or local administrative units. During this period, Sankhu had three local chiefs called Prādhānapamca, who were sometimes elected directly by the people and sometimes nominated by upper echelons of the Panchayat system. As soon as the multi-party system was reintroduced in 1990, people began to organise themselves under the banners of various political parties. Even though this political division sometimes created difficult relations among people, it did not disrupt the performance of any religious ritual activities in the town.

Most people in Sankhu preferred the unification of Sankhu into a single town unit or Municipality rather than to keep the town divided into three VDC. However, this wish of the Sankhu people was not honoured during the Panchayat time. After the change of the political system in 1990, the people in Sankhu hoped that their wish would materialise but for more than a decade nothing happened. Finally in the year 2002, the Nepalese Government announced to turn Sankhu into a municipality, Saṃkharāpur Nagarpālikā but continuous political turmoil in the country prevented any progress towards this direction. If the CA succeeds at making a new constitution any time soon this might take a shape.

### Population

The population data derived from the 1997 survey covers only the inhabitants of the town. It appears from this survey that the total population of the town of Sankhu is 5,340. Geographically Pukhulāchī is the smallest of the three VDC. It is mainly urban; its area covers the western half of the town. Only a small part of wards 5 and 6 of Pukhulāchī VDC are situated outside the town and, as explained, these are not

included in the survey. The eastern half of the town is divided between Vajrayoginī VDC and Suntol VDC; many wards of these two VDC are located outside the town. Table 7 shows only the population of those wards of the VDC, which lie inside the town. The gender distribution in Sankhu is almost equal: 49.5 per cent male and 50.5 per cent female.

**Table 7 Population distributions in different wards of the three VDCs inside the town area in 1997**

Pukhulāchhī VDC	Total Population	Percent
Ward 1	165	07.3
Ward 2	251	11.1
Ward 3	309	13.6
Ward 4	150	06.6
Ward 5	235	10.4
Ward 6	255	11.2
Ward 7	328	14.5
Ward 8	200	08.8
Ward 9	374	16.5
Total in Pukhulāchhī	2267	100.0
Suntol VDC	Total Population	Percent
Ward 1	354	21.4
Ward 2	394	23.9
Ward 3	312	18.9
Ward 4	178	10.8
Ward 5	202	12.2
Ward 6	211	12.8
Total in Suntol	1651	100.0
Vajrayoginī VDC	Total Population	Percent
Ward 1	253	17.8
Ward 2	403	28.3
Ward 3	276	19.4
Ward 4	145	10.2
Ward 5	177	12.4
Ward 6	168	11.8
Total in Vajrayoginī	1,422	100.0
Grand Total	5,340	100.0

This table shows that Pukhulāchhī is the biggest VDC of Sankhu in terms of population and wards. The wards consist of 165 to 374 inhabitants with an average of 252 inhabitants. If we compare the 1997 data with the Zanen's

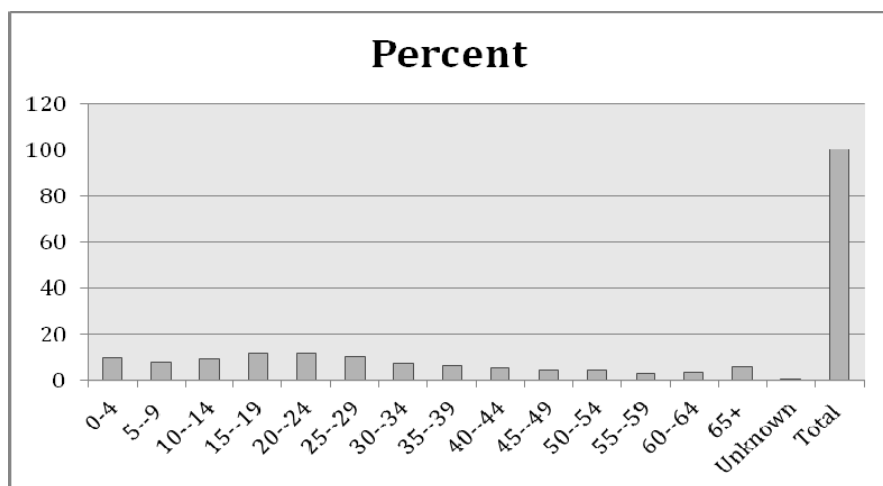


1978 data, the population has increased by 6.8 percent in about twenty years. The population in Sankhu was estimated at 5,000 in 1978.<sup>6</sup> The growth must be considered insignificant compared to the annual national population growth of 5.2 percent.

### Age distributions

Below Chart 1 shows the age distribution in the town. This chart shows that in Sankhu 9.8 per cent of the population are children under the age of four. For the sake of clarity, I shall compare these data with those on Pukhulāchī VDC, presented by the 1981 national census. My aim is to compare the recent data of different age groups with similar 1981 Pukhulāchī VDC data to offer an approximate idea on how the population situation has changed in Sankhu during the last sixteen years. Pukhulāchī, as the largest population area in the town may represent the whole town.

Chart 1 Age Distribution in Sankhu 1997



The 1981 figure for children of less than five-year of age was 12.83 per cent in Pukhulāchī VDC (Shrestha 1988: 12-13). If we compare this with the newly surveyed data, the figure has gone down by 3.03 per cent in the past sixteen years. It is clear that despite a decrease in the mortality rate of children of this age group in the national census, the percentage of young children in Sankhu has not increased.<sup>7</sup> One important factor for this difference might be the popularity of family planning among Sankhu

people, which may have resulted in a reduced birth rate.

The percentage of children between 5 to 9 is 7.8, that of those between 10 to 14 is 9.5, and of those between 15 to 19 is 11.6 per cent. The total of these three age groups from 5 to 19 is 28.9 per cent. Compared to the 1981 figure of Pukhulāchī VDC, which was 30.3, it has gone down by only 1.4 per cent in the past 16 year, which is not a drastic change. It again differs from the national figure, which shows a significant rise in the number of these age groups.<sup>8</sup>

The percentage of those aged between 20 and 24, 25 to 29, 30 to 34 and 35 to 39 are 11.8, 10.3, 7.1 and 6.2 per cent respectively, which amounts to 35.4 of the total population of Sankhu. In these groups too, the number has remained roughly unchanged with a slight decrease of about 0.7 percent in comparison with the 1981 figure of Pukhulāchī VDC.

The present survey shows that the population of between 40 and 44 is 5.2 percent that between 45 and 49 is 4.1 percent, between 50 and 54 it is 4.4 per cent and between 55 and 59 it is 2.8. In total, these four groups amount to 16.7 per cent. In the year 1981, this figure was 18.6 in Pukhulāchī VDC, which reveals that this age group has decreased by 1.9 percent during the past sixteen years.

The recent survey also shows that the people between 60 and 64 make up 3.2 percent and those aged 65 and above 5.9 percent. In total in these two age groups total 9.1 percent of the population. In 1981, the population above the age 59 was only 2.5, in Pukhulāchī VDC. This figure has increased about four times within a 16-year period. This may be due to increased longevity or to different patterns of immigration. The causes of longevity of the people in Sankhu vary. Proximity to modern medical facilities is one of the main reasons. In the past, people were not only unaware of modern medical facilities, but they were also out of most people's reach. With the gradual improvement of motor roads and the regular bus service to Kathmandu from Sankhu, where most modern hospitals and medical facilities are available, it has become easy for the people of Sankhu to receive treatment for complicated health problems. This may have resulted in decreasing untimely deaths.

This chart shows that the age group 10-29 years in the town is the largest covering 43.2 percent of the total population, while the middle age group 30-54 is the second largest covering 27 percent of the total population. Population of children in the age group 0-9 covers 17.6 percent while the population of old age group 55-65 and above covers 12.2 percent of the total population.

## Migration situation

Sankhu used to attract people from various parts of the Valley, as it was located on an important trade route to Tibet. However, this attraction vanished decades ago as an alternative road from Banepā to Kodāri opened in the 1960s. Since then, out-migration from Sankhu became a common phenomenon as many people shifted their businesses to Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal. Almost no in-migration has been recorded in Sankhu during the past several decades, except for one Tāmāṅg family, who came to settle in Sankhu only a few years ago. Due to a land scarcity, lack of employment opportunities and modern facilities, many people choose to leave Sankhu. Students following higher education also had to leave Sankhu, because there were no higher-level schools, except one high school. This situation has changed during the 1990s with the introduction of a frequent bus service from Sankhu to Kathmandu, which gave pupils an opportunity to attend University classes and return home on the same day. Well-to-do families still send their children to live in Kathmandu because of the educational facilities there. However, those who live in Kathmandu for study or for employment do not consider themselves belonging to Kathmandu. They frequently return to Sankhu to celebrate small and big festivals, and they also return during the official holidays. The Newar people's attachment to their traditional feasts and festivals keep them close to their birthplace, and the Newars of Sankhu are no exception. Although Kathmandu is not far away now, nor is it difficult to reach from Sankhu, adults from Sankhu are still inclined to move out, because of better employment and business opportunities. It also offers better health care and educational facilities. Therefore, many people from Sankhu have established themselves in Kathmandu, either engaging in individual trade and businesses or being employed by various governmental or non-governmental organisations.

It is notable that the data we obtained concerning the number of family members did not always represent the exact size of the family. In most cases it appeared that the number of persons registered during the survey included those family members who were away from Sankhu either temporarily or permanently, for reasons of study, employment or business. They still have their ancestral properties in Sankhu and were counted as real family members in the surveyed data by other members of their household. Most of them also come to cast their votes during elections.

In the recent past, Kathmandu has become congested with the influx of immigrants from all over the country and from India. The city suffers from traffic jams, and from air-pollution by uncontrolled numbers of old and

new motor vehicles. The expansion of greater Kathmandu has reached beyond Bāgmatī River, which means that Sankhu is not a distant town any more. As of now, many people may still be attracted to Kathmandu because of its dynamic atmosphere. On the other hand, Sankhu may well turn into a suburb of Kathmandu because of its calm, lush, green fields, its scenery and its unpolluted environment.

### **Household and family**

Most Newar households, i.e., the occupants of the same house, are composed of a large family in size. Sometimes three to four generations are living together under one roof eating from the same kitchen. It appeared from my survey that almost hundred percent of the households are made up of large family members. In a Newar household, a family includes great-grandparents, grandparents, parents and father's married brothers and unmarried sisters, one's own married brothers and their children and unmarried sisters as well. All these members share their meals from the same kitchen until they separate. Once siblings are separated they may have their own kitchen in a single house. Therefore, on average, the family size of Newar households is larger than that of their Parvate neighbours. The average household in Sankhu consists of 6.8 persons, which is a higher figure than that for the nation as a whole.<sup>9</sup>

Family size may be a special characteristic of Newar society throughout the Valley. Most Newar people regard that an undivided family has social prestige and strength. They consider it shameful to split a family. Apart from these normative aspects, economic dependency on the head of the family or on a single source of income also leads to the maintenance of the large family. Limited availability of land for cultivation and unemployment are the main reasons of such economic dependency. However, in the end, every family has to break up either by peaceful consent or through bitter quarrels among its members. Often such a split ends with intense disagreements among brothers. In many cases, the divided families continue to live in a small section of the parental house sharing other sections of it. The legal provisions in Nepal, which provide equal inheritance rights also, contribute to dividing a house into fractions.

Usually, the eldest male member of a household is considered the head of the house. Inheritance goes from father to sons on an equal basis. A daughter, who remains unmarried till after the age of 35, has her share in the ancestral property. Only on rare occasions relatives live with out-married daughters or sisters. In exceptional cases, parents or brothers may come to live in their married away daughters' or sisters' house for the rest

of their lives. This happens when they remain without any caretakers in their own homes or when they wish to leave their property to the family with whom they are going to spend the rest of their lives. Similarly, no out-married daughters or sisters go to live in their parental house. Except for occasional visits, it is embarrassing for men to reside in in-laws' homes in Newar society. Even when a girl has no other relatives and could occupy her parental house, she is not supposed to live there with her husband. To give birth in the parental home is also taboo. Children of married away sisters may, however, also grow up in their maternal uncle's home. That happens when such children receive no proper care in their father's home, for instance after an untimely death of one of their parents.

### **The socio-economic position of the Town**

The Newars are a multi-occupational community. People believe that the caste divisions among the Newars were originally introduced according to their occupations. However, a lot has changed in the course of time. The most recent changes have occurred during the 1960s following the 1964 legal code was introduced, which declared all Nepalese equal before the law. However, the tendency of maintaining the traditional notion of caste hierarchy has not yet been discarded.

Sankhu is dominantly an agriculture-based town. From an earlier study of the town by the Housing and Physical Department of His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG), it was found that 71 percent of the population of Sankhu had agriculture as their primary occupation and 22 percent had it as its secondary occupation. It also showed that 96 percent of them were engaged in secondary occupations: 28 percent in commerce, 13 percent in industries, and 27 percent in wage employment.<sup>10</sup> In 1978, Zanen (1986:148) assumed that 50 percent of the households were self-sufficient in food (rice), 30 percent had sufficient rice for eight months and 20 percent were not self-sufficient in rice for more than four months per year. The 1991 Census of Nepal also shows that only fifty percent of the economically active people practice agriculture as their main occupation in Sankhu, which is a decrease of 21 percent compared to the data presented by the Housing and Physical Department in 1969.

The 1991 Census shows that out of the total Newar population of 5,688, 4,496 were above the age of 10, and were capable of participating in economical activities, but that only 2,181 or 40.5 percent of them were actually economically active. It also showed that 18.8 percent were engaged in productive labour, 13.1 percent were engaged as shopkeepers, 5.3 percent were employed as professional technical workers while only

7.6 percent were found engaged as administrative, clerical and service workers.

However, the 1997 survey of Sankhu shows that only 36.5 percent of economically active people are engaged in agriculture while others were engaged in various other occupations. The survey tried to present more precise and detailed data on the socio-economic structure of the town. Especially as to land distribution, trade and business, and the professional structure we tried to obtain more elaborate data. In the following section I shall present the results of the survey for the economical structure of the town.

In this section, we have discussed mainly four different data available of the town in a time span of three decades. This comparison made it clear that year after year the people in Sankhu are slowly discarding their traditional occupation of agriculture. The 1969 data of the town presented by the Housing and Physical Department shows that up to that time, the majority (71 %) population was dependent on agriculture. This gradually decreased to 50% when Zanen made an estimate in 1978. If we are to believe the CBS census number of people still practicing agriculture remained the same until 1991. This is highly unlikely because during my survey in 1997 it had decreased to 36.5 percent. It is more likely that the dependency on agriculture gradually decreased yearly.

## **Occupations**

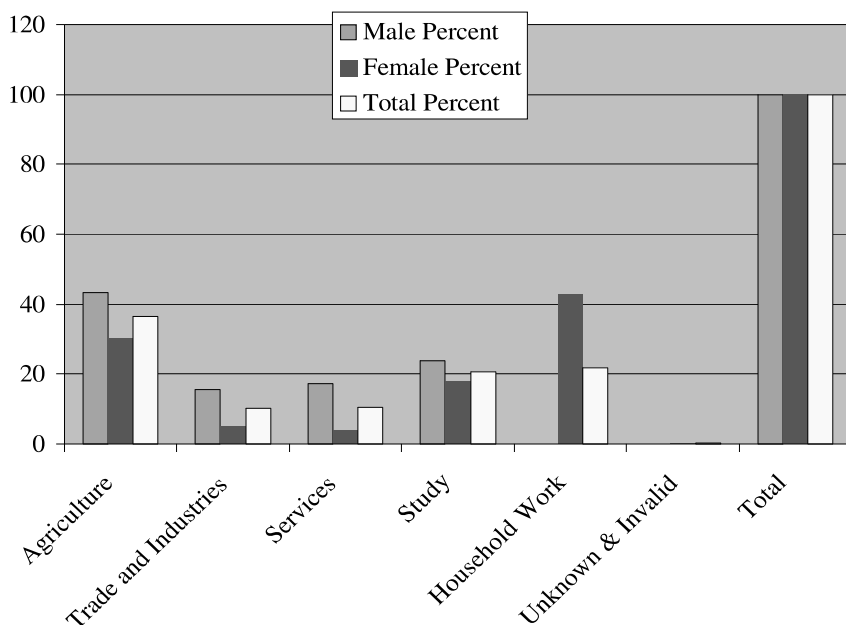
As we saw from our discussion above and from my 1997 survey, agriculture no longer remains the major occupation of the town. A large section of the population is still engaged in agriculture, but most people have also adopted various other jobs alongside farming. Many people engaged in agriculture are other side-businesses. This renders it difficult to define them simply as farmers.

People above 10 years old are economically active as farmers. From my survey it was found that 49 % of males and 51 % of females were economically active. Among them 36.5 % were engaged mainly in agriculture, 10.3 % in business and industries, 10.5 % in government service, 20.7 % in study and 21.7 % in household work.

When we compare the present data with the 1969 sample survey conducted by the Housing and Physical Department it appears that within thirty years, almost half of the agriculture oriented population has changed its occupation. In spite of this change, no considerable number of people appears to adopt other occupations either. Only 10.3 % appears to be engaged in business and industries and 10.5 % people are engaged in

services, i.e., in government service, while a great part of the population are school children (20.7%) and in working at home (21.7 %). These data reveal that an important portion of the Sankhu population is economically unproductive.

Chart 2 Population distributions by their main occupation (10 years and above)



### Land ownership

In the course of history, land in Kathmandu Valley has been fragmented into small pieces. Today it is hard to find big plots of land owned by a single person. One may find a people cultivating a tiny plot of land of less than an *ānā*.<sup>11</sup>

At present, in Sankhu, it is impossible to find a single plot of land at one location owned by a single person that exceeds eight *ropanī* (0.05 hectare). It appears from my survey that people from almost all castes in Sankhu own land. The total agricultural land in Sankhu is 5,742 *ropanī*. The Śreṣṭha, the largest population of the town, possess most of the land (67.3 %). The Jyāpu occupy 8.5 percent, the Nāy occupy 4.6 percent, the Vajrācārya 3.1 percent, and the Sāymi 3.0 percent. Similarly, the Joṣī

occupy 2.3 percent, Malla Khacarā 2.2 percent, the Chipā 1.6 percent, the Kāranjit 1.4 percent, the Jogi 1.0 percent, and the Prajāpati 1.0 percent. Other castes like the Duiṃ the Doṃ, the Nau, the Gathu, the Rājopādhyāy, the Nāju, the Citrakār, the Kau, the Po, the Śākya and the Danyā each occupy less than one percent of land. A single woman from the Danyā caste occupies only one *ropanī* of land.

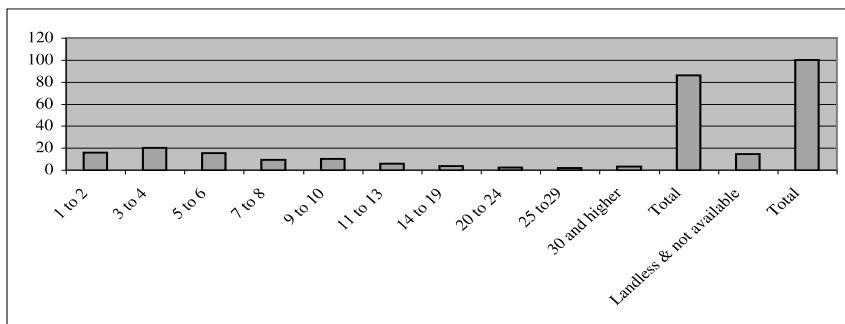
**Table 8 Land holding by caste in Sankhu**

Caste	Ropanī	% of Total
Rājopādhyāy (Brahmin Priests)	16	0.3
Vajracārya (Buddhist priests)	176	3.1
Śākya (Married monks or goldsmith)	7	0.1
Jośī (Astrologer)	133	2.3
Śreṣṭha	3865	67.3
Malla Khacarā	126	2.2
Jyāpu (Farmers)	492	8.5
Prajāpati (Potters)	58	1.0
Gathu (Gardener)	25	0.4
Chipā or Ranjitkār (Dyers)	91	1.6
Citrakār (Painters)	8	0.1
Kāranjit (Funeral Priests)	80	1.4
Nau (Barbers)	46	0.8
Sāymi (Oil pressers)	170	3.0
Duiṃ (Palanquin Carriers, Trumpeters)	49	0.9
Kau (Blacksmiths)	7	0.1
Nāju (Kunwar)	16	0.3
Nāy (Butchers, Musicians)	262	4.6
Jogi (tailor and musicians)	60	1.0
Doṃ (Dholak players)	47	0.8
Danyā (Funeral Priests)	1	0.0
Dyolā (Cleaners, Guardians)	7	0.1
Total	5742	100.0



According to Table 8, although all castes in Sankhu are occupying land, there are many families who do not possess any land. It shows that there are only 677 families who possess land while 122 families are landless. Only 23 families or 2.9 percent of the population occupy 30 *ropanī* or more land, while 279 families or 35.4 percent occupy less than five *ropanī*. There are 121 families who occupy 5 to 6 *ropanī*, 71 families who occupy 7 to 8 *ropanī*, 80 families who occupy 9 to 10 *ropanī*, 45 families occupy 11 to 13 *ropanī*, 27 families occupy 14 to 19 *ropanī*, 18 families occupy 20 to 24 *ropanī* and 36 families (4.5 %) occupy more than 25 *ropanī* of land.

Chart 3 Land occupation per household in *ropanī*



Only 341 families or 43.21 percent said they possess their own land. Among them only four families claimed that they owned fifteen to 25 *ropanī* of land, while 240 families or 30.41 percent said they owned only one to four *ropanī* each and 85 families or 10.77 percent claimed to own five to eleven *ropanī* each. There are 241 families whose land is cultivated by tenants (*mhay*) while they retain the ownership rights (*tasim*). The tenants need to pay from one *murī* to two *murī* of paddy per *ropanī* yearly to the owners, depending upon the type of land. Before the 1964 land reform, the landowners had a monopoly over land but the 1964 land reform curtailed their rights and they can do nothing without the consent of the tenants. There are 384 families who cultivate other people's land, i.e., land belonging to the *tasim* or landlord. Among them, six families cultivate 25 to 40 or more *ropanī* of land each, 258 families cultivate one to four *ropanī* each and 120 families cultivate 6 to 20 *ropanī* each. Only 72 families in Sankhu appeared to own land belonging to the Guthi Corporation. They possess a total of 371 *ropanī* of land.

### Methods of agriculture

For the purpose of collecting land tax, the Nepalese Government has divided land into four categories: *abal*, *doyam*, *sim* and *cāhār*. These categories refer to differences in fertility and quality of the soil. *Abal* is the first grade of land with the most fertile soil where two crops are usually grown, *doyam* is the second grade of land, *sim* is the third grade and *cāhār* the fourth. In Sankhu, all these four grades of land are found and on most land at least one crop per year is grown. The largest area of land in Sankhu is considered to be first-grade land because two crops per year are grown. However, almost all land is insufficiently irrigated and most of it is dependent on the monsoon rains. For lack of proper irrigation facilities most fields remain dry for more than four months. In an earlier study of Pukhulāchī, one of the three VDC in Sankhu, I presented the grave situation of irrigation and suggested that if the situation could be improved, agricultural production could increase considerably in the area (Shrestha 1988). Unfortunately, no changes have occurred to that effect in the past twelve years.

People are mainly dependent on traditional methods of agriculture. In the mid-1960s, chemical fertilizers were introduced in Nepal. People in Sankhu use them side by side with their traditional organic fertilizers. At first, the use of chemical fertilizers helped a great deal to increase production in quantity. In the course of time, however, because of salinization, its negative impacts have appeared. A gradual decrease of agricultural production has been observed in the recent past. Whether to continue with chemical fertilizers or use natural fertilizers is actually a major debate among the farmers in Nepal. Many farmers have abandoned chemical fertilizers while others still continue using them.

In the Valley, farmers still rely on manual labour for cultivating their fields. Only in the plain areas mechanical ploughs are used. Farmers are fully dependent on manual power for sowing, transplanting seedlings and harvesting crops. Agricultural labourers are hired from the town or from villages around Sankhu. For a seven to eight hours workday a labourer earns a maximum wage of one hundred and twenty rupees.<sup>12</sup> Women are not employed for hard work like ploughing land or threshing the harvest or carrying loads. They are employed for relatively lighter work like breaking the soil mound after the plough, sowing, transplanting and harvesting rice, wheat or potatoes. For these works, women are paid half or a little more than half of what men get.



Plate 13 Terraced fields to the south of the town of Sankhu (April 1997).

### Major crops

Rice is the major agricultural crop in Sankhu, followed by potatoes and wheat. In the past, potatoes were not a popular crop, but during the last three decades potatoes became the second biggest agricultural product in Sankhu. A conservative estimation is that on an average, on each *ropanī* of land an average of 200 kg of rice per year is grown, which means a total of 1,148, 400 kg of rice on the 5,742 *ropanī* of agricultural land in Sankhu. During the winter seasons these lands grow either wheat or potatoes or vegetables

Since each person consumes on average 200 kg of rice per year, this would mean that the Sankhu people consume 1,068,000 kg or 92.9 percent of their total rice production. From this estimation it becomes clear that Sankhu grows only a little more rice than its consumption needs. However, this does not mean that every household in Sankhu is self-sufficient in rice.

We must consider that there are many households, which do not have sufficient rice for their yearly consumption. Depending upon the size of a family, those who possess less than five *ropanī* of land are not considered self-sufficient in rice. In spite of this, each year, a big amount of rice from Sankhu is sold to Kathmandu, while tons of imported cheap rice is sold in

Sankhu every year.<sup>13</sup>



Plate 14 Faces of young farmers in the town (May 1997).

Potato is the second largest crop of the town. It is also the second largest agricultural product of Sankhu. People in Sankhu consume potatoes as a vegetable but not as a staple food, so those who grow potatoes sell the major part of their harvest in the market. Every year, wheat growing is declining due to the growing popularity of potatoes in Sankhu. Farmers hardly grow green vegetables or fruits. Not more than ten families are engaged in growing green vegetables like onion, garlic, spinach, mustard, radish, pumpkin, cucumber, etc., for which they use only a small plot of land. Therefore, their production is far from sufficient to fulfil local demand. At present, a few retail shops, which sell vegetables and fruits in Sankhu, buy their stocks from Kathmandu.

### **Trade and business**

Since the road to Kodari through Banepā was opened in 1967, trade in Sankhu has suffered tremendously. The shifting of the traditional main route to Tibet had an irreparable impact on the trade of Sankhu. Not only did Sankhu lose the trade route to Tibet, but it also lost all the customers

from Sindhupālcok, an adjoining District. Since 1991, the Sankhu trade suffered severely again by the construction of a motorable road linking Melanci with the Kodari road at Panchkhal.<sup>14</sup> Many customers, who used to come from Melanchi, Helambu and surrounding villages have stopped going to Sankhu.

There are more than two hundred shops of all kinds in Sankhu. Local trade and businesses are still continuing, but on a smaller scale than in the past. Despite the great loss of trade and high competition the Śreṣṭhas of Sankhu still see it as their ambition to try to possess a wholesale or retail shop to sell essential goods of daily consumption.

### **Shops**

Most of the above-mentioned shops are retailers but some of them are wholesalers. Local traders and merchants own all of them. They supply daily necessities to the local people as well as to people living in near-by villages. One successful shop owner said that on the busiest days his profit amounts to more than ten thousand rupees while on ordinary days also his profit never goes below a thousand rupees.

However, because of high competition nowadays not all the shops in Sankhu enjoy such profits. Recently, some of the surrounding villages also started to open shops in their own localities, which has badly affected business in Sankhu. One of the shop owners complained that as soon as a shop opened at Pālubarī he lost more than half of his regular business. Some of the shop owners have transferred their businesses to Kathmandu where there are higher demands.

### **Livestock and butcher's shops**

The tradition of rearing domestic animals like buffaloes and cows has become increasingly rare in Sankhu. Only a few butchers keep buffaloes for milk and meat. Except for a few religious families and some farmers, nobody keeps cows any longer. Only a few farmers rear goats and sheep. Some of the butchers and the Jogi families are rearing pigs, but pork is not usual among high caste Newars, so there is no shop to be found for pork in Sankhu. Buffalo meat is the most common meat consumed among the Newars. There are three shops selling mutton and chicken in Sankhu, but not a single shop selling lamb. Among 20 butchers' stalls seventeen sell only buffalo meat.

**Table 9 Shops in Sankhu by varieties**

Kind of shops	Number of shops
Kirānā shop	52
Cold store	4
Vegetable	9
Utensil	6
Cloth	12
Tailoring	8
Readymade garment	7
Hardware	4
Cosmetics	10
Medical	5
Credit company	1
Bookshop	1
Stationary	2
Shoes	7
Shoe maker	3
Tea shops	17
Restaurant & Bar	9
Poultry	2
Hairdressing	4
Carpenter/Furniture	6
Electronic Repair	7
Watch Repair	1
Electrical	2
Blacksmith	2
Rice Mill	14
Meat (butchers)	20
Total	214

However, many of those butchers' stalls are of a temporary nature because most of them have no permanent place and they open irregularly when they have buffaloes to butcher. They butcher animals according to the local demand for fresh meat. A butcher said that on a normal day, about two hundred kilograms of buffalo meat are sold in Sankhu. During the major festival days people consume a lot more and the local butchers are sometimes unable to supply enough meat. Especially during the major Hindu festivals like Dasain, high caste people sacrifice several dozens of buffaloes, goats, sheep, chickens and ducks at various temples. Each butcher's shop sells not less than a thousand kilograms of buffalo meat during Dasain, a butcher informed me.

### Poultry farming

Poultry farming is one of the most common small-scale businesses in Sankhu. There are many people who are engaged in this business. They usually keep a limited number of chickens at home for meat and eggs. They produce mainly for local demand, while some also supply their products to Kathmandu. However, there is one registered poultry farm, which is running a systematic commercial poultry business in Sankhu. It rears chickens and buys chicken and eggs from other small farmers, which are then sold in Kathmandu. It also produces feed for chicken and other domesticated animals. Besides this farm there is one more shop, which sells feeds for poultry and livestock and sells chicken and eggs.

### Liquor and beverage houses

In Sankhu, there are several beverage shops (*bhatti*), which sell traditional beer, made of rice or wheat. There are also many liquor houses (*sulim*) where traditional alcohol is sold. These beverage (*bhatti*) and liquor (*sulim*) houses are not legal, but they are famous for their products and not strictly prohibited. Most Sāyami, many Vajrācārya, some Śreṣṭha as well as Jyāpu families in Sankhu own such shops. There are 29 known *bhattis* while several others do not openly sell their products. Especially many Vajrācārya, as well as some Śreṣṭha and Jyāpu, who sell hard-liquor, do their business secretly. They have regular customers from Sankhu and from the surrounding areas. Some butchers also run *bhatti* for low caste people. Bhattis are very popular for their homebrewed beer and other alcoholic drinks. Bhattis also function as meeting places. Although it is not respectable to visit such *bhattis*, people do go there to spend their leisure time; they discuss on current politics and new events. Youngsters as well as old people enjoy drinking beer in such *bhattis*. As one *bhatti* owner said, he is satisfied with his business in spite of harassments he receives from the local police and from politicians. He said he has to appease those local politicians and police by supplying them with free drinks during Panchayat days. He said this situation has not changed much for him even after the 1990 political change in Nepal, because politicians as well as police have become more corrupt than ever before. He continues his business without any fear. Selling homemade beer is considered to be one of the most profitable businesses, which produces good profits even with a small investment.

### **Bakeries (sweet), teashops and restaurants**

*Marikaḥmi* or *haluvāi* are the local names for bakers or traditional sweet makers in Nepal. They produce traditional sweets and bread (*mari*). In Sankhu, they have turned their shops into teashops together with their traditional products at the beginning of the 1960s. At present there are six such shops. Only in the 1970s, tea gained popularity among the local people. In addition to these shops eleven more teashops and nine restaurants cum bars have appeared in Sankhu. Most teashop-cum-restaurants sell snacks and other local foodstuffs and their major customers come from outside of the town. Modern bakery products are not yet popular in Sankhu, but some of the teashops get their bakery supplies from Kathmandu.

### **Rice mills**

Rice mills came to Sankhu as soon as the town was electrified in 1972. Before that, people were heavily dependent on the traditional rice husking system (*kuti*). With the introduction of rice mills, the traditional system has been abandoned. To make beaten or flattened rice (*baji*) the wooden mortars (*ugah*) and pestles (*lusi*) have also been replaced by electric machines. Similarly, electric machines have also replaced water-generated traditional grinding mills (*lahgha*). Many people in Sankhu practice the rice milling these days. Usually, all the three mentioned services (husking, beating and grinding) are now found combined in a single rice mill. There are fourteen rice mills in Sankhu today. They produce polished rice to fulfil local demand and also as export produce. Their most profitable business is to supply polished rice to wholesalers and retailers in Kathmandu. Every day five to ten tons of polished rice is prepared from each rice mill to be carried away to Kathmandu. Although there are only fourteen rice mills in Sankhu, more than fifty small businessmen (*baṃjā*) are engaged in these rice mills. As the production of rice is quite insufficient in Sankhu for the supply of polished rice, these rice mills are mainly dependent on small businessmen who collect rice stocks from the surrounding villages and various settlements of the Sindhupālcok and Kavrepālāmcok districts. They also collect unhusked rice from various places of the Tarāi, the southern region of Nepal. The beaten or flattened rice produced by some of these rice mills is used for snacks by the Newars especially during festivals. Some of these businessmen are also selling wheat flour in Kathmandu.



### **Milk supply**

With the opening of a chilling centre by the Dairy Development Cooperation at Sankhu two decades ago, the milk supply in Sankhu is becoming scarcer and scarcer. Only the Parvate farmers living around Sankhu are supplying milk to Sankhu, but their milk production is far from sufficient to fulfil the demand, because the farmers around Sankhu are encouraged to sell their milk to the chilling centre. Because of the high demand for milk, only diluted milk is to be found in Sankhu these days. The milk-chilling centre at Sankhu collects milk only to supply to the central plant of the Dairy Development Cooperation in Kathmandu, so it does not go to Sankhu.

### **Other small-scale industries**

In the past, cloth weaving was a popular industry in Sankhu. Since imported clothes are sold in Nepalese markets, this industry has almost come to an end. Some families still continue their traditional weaving industry for their own consumption, but most have abandoned it.

One man produces soap from his factory and supplies it to the Sankhu market and some other villages. As the only industry of its kind in Sankhu his business is making a good profit. One family produces granulated sugar (*cāku*) and sells it only to Sankhu.

Weaving carpets is another small-scale but popular industry in Sankhu. At present however, only four entrepreneurs have maintained this business and about a hundred people are employed by this industry. Its profits varied, but during the past few years the business dwindled quickly as the demand decreased.

### **Handicrafts**

The 1997 survey also recorded that people in Sankhu practice other economic activities. Many girls and women practice knitting sweaters for commercial purpose. Some people are found engaged as carpenters, goldsmiths, house builders, tailors, statue-makers, wick makers, leaf-plate makers, carpet weavers, spinning wool and cotton, weaving textiles and making straw mats. This knit sweaters, has provides a good opportunity to generate income among the women of various ages in Sankhu for the last three decades.

### Services and other employment

Most Newars do not like government jobs. Most choose to continue with their traditional trade and businesses. They do not find it appropriate to join the police and military forces. In the past, the government itself had been systematically excluding the Newar people from joining these two sectors. After 1951 such restrictions were relaxed to a certain extent, but the same trend continued for the whole period of Panchayat (1960 to 1990). Therefore, among the Newars the tendency to become traders and businessmen remains strong. This is especially the case with the people from Sankhu because of their monopoly on the Tibet trade. Table 10 gives an exact figure of individuals engaged in government service. A few are employed in the police and military services but they are not holding high posts. Some are working as mechanics, electricians, masons, paper cutters, barbers, drivers, computer technicians, typists, painters, bus conductors and cleaners.

**Table 10 Occupational status by sex (Governmental service)**

Status	Male		Female		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Peon	15	8.7	6	8.2	21	8.5
Non-gazetted 3 class	74	42.8	38	52.1	112	45.5
Non-gazetted 1st class	38	22.0	12	16.4	50	20.3
Gazettes officers	46	26.6	17	23.3	63	25.6
Total	173	100.0	73	100.0	246	100.0

Most governmental, semi-governmental and non-governmental services are concentrated in Kathmandu and this prevents people from working for them. Only a branch of the commercial Nepal Bank is situated in Sankhu, where a few locals are employed. Apart from this bank there are twelve schools, which includes three primary, lower secondary, and higher secondary and seven privately run lower secondary schools, where 72 people from Sankhu are employed as teaching staff.

## Language

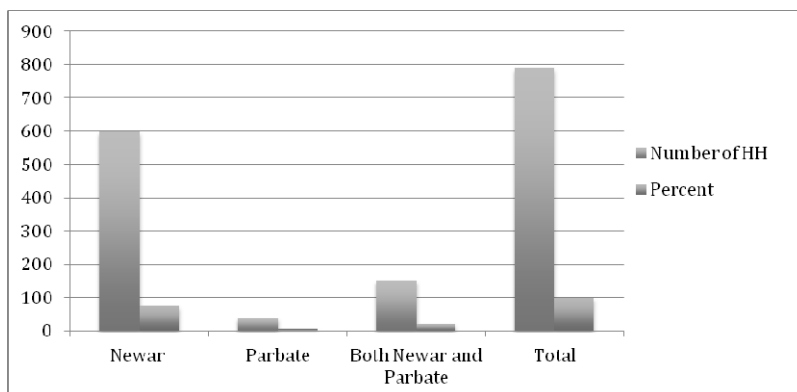
The language of the Newars has remained one of the most influential languages of Nepal till the 1960s. Those who came to settle inside the Kathmandu Valley learned Newar language without difficulty and used it as the language of communication. However, this situation has rapidly changed since the one-language policy of the government in educational institutions, administration, courts and electronic media. This policy was damaging the Newar language, because it succeeded in reducing the Newar language from one of the most important languages of the country to a minority language. As the language of the most proficient traders of Nepal, it became a lingua franca of the Valley. Even now, most Parvate or Tāmāṅ adults residing around Sankhu are able to speak the Newar language but only a few of their children do so. For the Newars themselves, it has become difficult to maintain their own language because of the domination of the Parvate or the Khas-Nepali language. Many Newar parents are inclined to teach Khas-Nepali and English to their children and even speak Khas-Nepali in their own homes at the cost of their mother tongue, thereby hoping to improve their children's chances for jobs.

If we look at the 1991 CBS (Central Bureau of Statistics) census, only 66.27 % of the total Newar population (1,041,090) maintains the Newar language as their mother tongue.<sup>15</sup> The census reports are criticised, however, by many Nepalese and foreign scholars for not presenting accurate data. From my own research, I concluded that the CBS census on the use of the mother tongue by non-Nepali speaking people was inaccurate. Obviously, the CBS attempted to convey the impression that the number of Nepali speakers has increased at the cost of Newar speakers. The CBS data showed that 41.7% of the Newar population in Suntol VDC of Sankhu adopted Nepali as their mother tongue, which in fact was not the case. The 1997 household survey shows that the entire population in Sankhu maintained the Newar language as their mother tongue.<sup>16</sup>

The 1997 survey data reveal that the entire adult population of Sankhu uses the Newar as the only language of communication in their household, while 5.1 percent of them use only Khas-Nepali with their children and 19.1 percent of them uses both Newar and Khas-Nepali with their children. However, the rest of the population (75.8%) uses only Newar with their children. In the early 1960s, one Pradhan family in Sankhu used to speak Khas-Nepali with their children. In about forty years, this figure has increased to 151 households (24.2 %) of the total of 779 households in

Sankhu, if we take together the above mentioned two groups: one using only Khas-Nepali (5.1%) and the other using Khas-Nepali and Newar (19.1 %) with their children. See chart 4.

Chart 4 Households by languages used by parents with their children, 1997



In Kathmandu, this trend of speaking Khas-Nepali in Newar households was already introduced by some of the families who served in Rana palaces before the political change of 1951. The attraction of the Khas-Nepali language increased among the Newar parents when it was imposed as the sole medium of education in Nepal after the 1951 political change. Since Khas-Nepali is the only language accepted in the administrations and of the courts in justice, most Newars (excluding old aged people) have a working knowledge of Khas-Nepali these days. Many of those who have obtained high school certificates or university degrees may communicate in English, because it is taught as a second language in schools and universities in Nepal.

## Education

Basic education in Nepal is not compulsory and nor can it be called free as the government claims it to be. Education in Nepal is expensive. In Sankhu, there is one Higher Secondary School, one Lower Secondary School and three primary schools funded by government grants. In 1997, at the time of the survey, the Higher Secondary School counted a total number of 613 students (from grade four to grade twelve). There were twenty-six teachers. The Lower Secondary School counted 304 pupils (from grade one to grade seven) and ten teachers. Three primary schools had 639 pupils in total and each counted eight teachers. Apart from these

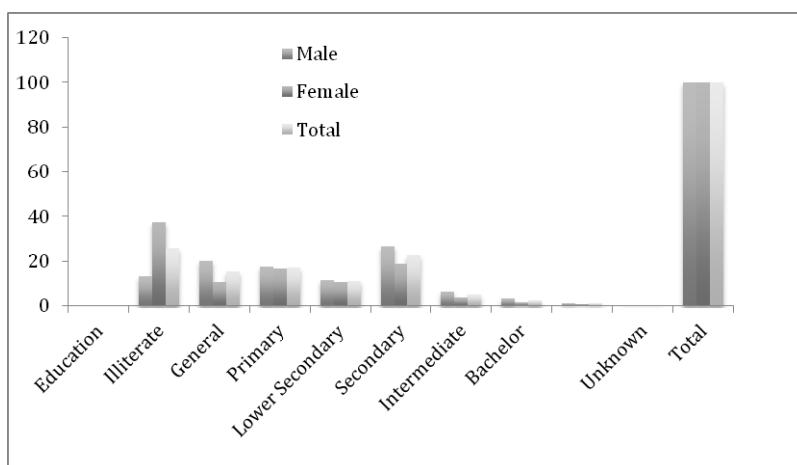
schools supported by the government, there are seven privately run boarding schools whose total number of pupils was 560 with a total of 36 teachers. The government-run primary schools are free up till the 5th grades while above the 5th grades the pupils have to pay fees and buy books. Privately run boarding schools are so-called English-medium schools and they charge very high fees according to rates set by each school individually. Fees vary from two hundred to ten thousands rupees. Privately run schools are gaining popularity in Nepal because of the emphasis they put on teaching better English than is taught in government schools. The government schools are losing ground because of their poor standard of teaching.

Pupils in Sankhu are compelled to go to Kathmandu or elsewhere for further study once they have obtained their School Leaving Certificate (SLC) at the completion of their tenth grade of secondary school when pupils generally are sixteen years of age. In September 1997, for the first time, the only high school of Sankhu, Bhāgyodaya, dispensed a course of higher secondary level, which provides the prospect of studying up to grade twelve in Sankhu. In September 1997, it first received 36 students for the different arts subjects it teaches. In Sankhu, once pupils complete their SLC, they usually stop their study, because of the costs involved. Only a few, privileged pupils continue their studies at the University level.

From my survey it appeared that in Sankhu there are 4,821 people above the age of four. Among them 1,230 or 25.5 percent are illiterate: 313 males and 917 females. 741 or 15.4 percent received general education (479 male and 262 female), 822 or 17.1 percent received primary education, (479 male and 262 female), 528 or 11.0 percent received lower secondary education (275 male and 253 female) and 1,099 or 22.8 percent received secondary education (636 male and 463 female). Only 235 or 4.9 percent received intermediate education (148 male and 87 female), 113 or 2.3 obtained a graduate degree (79 male and 34 female) and 42 or 0.9 percent received postgraduate degrees (28 male and 14 female). From 11 or 0.2 percent no answer was received.

It becomes clear from the figures that, women are far behind in matters of education. It also becomes clear from our figures that the higher the education level the less participants are registered. In case of women this tendency is very strong. The lack of graduate schools in Sankhu appears to have a great effect on education. Compared to the number of pupils (1,099) who passed the School Leaving Certificate examination, only 235 or 21.3 percent did their intermediate. The number decreases in graduate and postgraduate levels.

Chart 5 Literacy and education level by gender (for age 4 years and above)



These figures clearly indicate that higher education in Sankhu is not accessible for a large number of people. Actually this conclusion is more striking when we look at the national figures on education. The 1991 Census of Nepal shows that 15,145,071 people above the age of four are supposed to receive education. However, only 5,958,748 or 39.3 percent are found literate (68.3 percent men and 31.6 percent women). Among the literate people, 22.8 percent had no schooling while 41.0 percent received primary education (1-5 grade only), 22.2 percent received secondary education (6-10 grade), 5.0 percent passed School Leaving Certificate, 2.2 percent passed intermediate level, 1.3 percent graduated, and only 0.3 percent was post-graduate while 223 persons (192 men and 31 women) received other degrees (4.5 percent did not state their education level).

## Transportation and communications

Although Sankhu is situated only seventeen kilometres from Kathmandu and is linked with Kathmandu by a motor road since 1930s, this road is never in a good condition. The dire condition of the road remained unchanged till the beginning of the 1990s when it was fully improved. Previously, one could reach Sankhu by an infrequent commercial taxi or by lorries carrying loads. At the beginning of the 1980s, a bus service started operating from Kathmandu to Sankhu. Nowadays, every twenty minutes a bus runs to Kathmandu from Sankhu and back. In addition, the

Cooperative Transportation Service, a semi-governmental organisation is running some buses to Sankhu from Kathmandu. However, most buses are very old and often carry too many passengers, so the hour-long journey is highly uncomfortable, especially for elderly people and children. Nevertheless, because of this regular bus service, many people from Sankhu who are studying in Kathmandu or employed travel to and from Kathmandu every day. It costs less than ten rupees (15 cents) for a one-way journey. Those who can afford it take a taxi, which charges around four to seven dollars (200 to 500 hundred rupees) for a one-way ride. Many trucks and lorries are in use for carrying commodities from Kathmandu to Sankhu and back.

These days a gravelled road links Sankhu to Sindhupālcok at Bhotechaur and at Phataksilā Chap. Since 2001/2, it has been linked with Phatkesvor, where a road to Melanchi via Pāmachkhāl already exists. Once this road is opened, it will provide the shortest way for people of Sindhupālcok to reach Kathmandu. As soon as this road is completed, therefore, it is anticipated that businesses in Sankhu will once again flourish. Our survey shows that there are nineteen Sankhu families who own a bus, a truck or a car. Thirty-nine people were found using a motorcycle for transportation while only forty-nine families have a bicycle.

There is a post office in Sankhu. Another medium of communications is the telephone; at the time of my survey in 1997, there were 22 telephone lines in Sankhu. For nearly two decades (1973 till 1991), there was only one telephone at the local Nepal Bank. During the last eight years more telephones were connected and every year the number has been increasing. In 2000, more than two hundred households had a telephone connection. Today, three Nepalese daily newspapers are in regular circulation in Sankhu. The number of subscribers was 106 in 1997. The majority of the houses in Sankhu have a radio; according to my survey the number was 656. Television is a very new medium in Nepal; it started its regular broadcasting only in 1985. Its popularity increased very swiftly. In Sankhu, 543 households possessed a television set in 1997. Most of them can only receive one single Nepalese channel; while many also started to receive several other channels through locally made dish antennas. Thirty-nine households also have video decks in their home. Table 11 gives a glimpse of facilities available in Sankhu:

**Table 11 Numbers of Household (NHH) according to facilities available in Sankhu**

HHN having Facilities	Yes		NO		Total
	NHH	Percent	NHH	Percent	NHH
Radio	656	84.2	123	15.8	779
Television	543	69.7	236	30.3	779
Video Deck	39	5.0	740	95.0	779
Cycle	49	6.3	730	93.7	779
Motorcycle	39	5.0	740	95.0	779
Tractor	15	1.9	764	98.1	779
Motor (Bus, Truck, etc.)	19	2.4	760	97.6	779
Telephone	225	28.9	554	71.1	779
Private Tap	175	22.5	604	77.5	779
Toilet	425	54.6	354	45.4	779
Daily News	106	13.6	673	86.4	779

### Health and sanitation

Probably one of the gravest problems in Sankhu relates to health and sanitation. People are not aware of sanitation, because of a lack of health education. As stated above, most people in Sankhu have to open solid waste sites (*sāgā*) adjoining their houses. Almost half of the population in Sankhu does not have private toilets in their home. Only recently people in Sankhu started to feel the necessity of private toilets. At the time of my survey, more than 50 percent of the houses were found with toilets. Some of the public latrines have been closed down because of the construction of buildings (VDC offices or Schools and playgrounds), while many are still in use. There are fifteen public latrines, which are still in use in and around Sankhu. Only pigs roaming around are the sporadic cleaners of those latrines, otherwise they are left alone. In the past, low caste people like the Po and the Nāy used to collect pig dung from the streets to be used as fertilizer, but this tradition has been abandoned as they found it disgraceful work. From the viewpoint of sanitation these open latrines cause health hazards.

People in Sankhu are mainly dependent on traditional sources of drinking water: there are 22 wells and 16 stone spouts. Not all the stone spouts are functioning well, because the traditional technology applied to



feed those taps has been forgotten. At present, none of the living persons in the Valley possess any clue of the sources of such taps. Often stories are told that when somebody went on digging to find out the sources of such taps, they met with burning wicks with oil on earthen shallows, deep in the ground, and the whole source dried up for ever. However, most of the wells are still in good condition. People in Sankhu are greatly dependent on these wells and stone taps, because modern sources of drinking water are not reliable. In 1960, a reservoir was made about three kilometres north of the town to supply drinking water to its people. For decades it remained the only modern source of water supply. As this became inadequate to supply water to Sankhu, a new reservoir was made further north of that location in the early 1980s. It feeds 21 public taps and 175 private taps with water. However, the water supply is without purification system, so the water received from the taps is not of better quality than water from open rivers. Especially during the monsoon when there is an excess of rain, the taps flow with muddy undrinkable liquids. Water contamination leads to epidemics of water-born diseases.

In Sankhu there are no hospitals or doctors available. There is a small health dispensary without a physician and badly equipped. Even for first-aid treatment it is unreliable. Infrequently, doctors or health assistants visit this dispensary, but one cannot rely on the regularity of these visits. For any kind of modern medical consultations people are dependent on local medical shops run by untrained self-educated businessmen. There are no facilities for emergency treatment and for complicated health problems patients need to go to Kathmandu. Although it has become very easy to reach Kathmandu by bus, this is not a convenient mode for transport for sick people. Many patients die on the way to a hospital. Usually, people in Sankhu consult local traditional doctors (*vaidya*), most of whom are not full time practitioners. If this does not work they go to local medical shops. Only if both fail to produce results do they rush to Kathmandu to see a doctor or to visit a hospital. Because of this situation, traditional healers are still very popular and they are the most reliable health workers to be found in Sankhu. There are 36 *vaidya* in Sankhu. Most of them are called *jhārāphuki vaidya* or the healers who treat patients by blowing air with secret mantras or *nādi vaidya*, who treat patients by examining their pulse. Some of them are also called *tāntrik vaidya*, who treat their patients using *tāntrik* methods. According to one of my informants, these secret mantras consist of several names of gods and goddesses as well as ghosts and spirits. The names are recited according to the type of diseases to be treated.

An old traditional healer, Tuising Maka Śreṣṭha, who expired at the

age of 97 in 1998, was the most famous traditional healer (*jhārāphuki vaidya*) in Sankhu. Not only the people of Sankhu, but also those from far off villages used to visit him. Several dozens of people visited him every day and on a special day like Tuesdays and Saturdays more than a hundred patients consulted him. Often his herbal medicines succeeded in saving people's lives but sometimes he too had to suggest to people to consult modern doctors and hospitals for better treatments. Before he died, I interviewed him frequently and observed his practices. Also his healing practice was recorded on video. He was the only full time *vaidya* in Sankhu.

## Conclusion

In this Chapter, we discussed Sankhu's socio-economic position: geopolitics and political divisions, family size and households, age distribution and migration, trade and commerce, agriculture and land possession, language and education, transportation and communication, health and sanitation, etc. This bird's-eye view of Sankhu's socio-economic and political situation in historical perspective shows a number of things.

First, it may be noted that Sankhu has been administratively divided since the 1960s. From that point of view the town does not seem to be administrated as a unitary entity. Its divisions into three parts created rivalries, which did not exist in the past. Party politics have now given a political dimension to those rivalries. We will see in the later chapters that it is religion, socio-religious associations (*guthi*) especially the cult of the tutelary goddess of the town, which has maintained a sense of belonging to the urban locality and which still contributes to Sankhu's social cohesion and identity. Secondly, it is clear that, with the unfavourable development of the national infrastructure since the 1960s, the town has been subjected to an economic crisis. The phenomenon of migration from the town to Kathmandu of many traders for economic reasons halted demographic growth. The educational situation, especially the restricted educational facilities, has enhanced a further out-migration of youths from the town.

On the whole, Sankhu has been impoverished since the second half of the twentieth century. However, at the same time, through the development of communications and infrastructure, Sankhu is about to be incorporated into the wider Kathmandu. This process of national "globalisation" presents new opportunities for Sankhu's population. The reduction of travel time between Sankhu and Kathmandu makes it an attractive option for those people of Sankhu employed in Kathmandu to commute and continue to live in Sankhu. In this way, trade (in

Kathmandu) and agriculture (in Sankhu) gives the Newar households their multi-economic character, which may improve their overall prosperity. This wealth will partly be reinvested in the town of Sankhu. Therefore, I expect the end of economic decline and beginning of a gradual economic growth on a par with the rate of national development. This growth will have an impact on the social organisation of the inhabitants and thus on the management of the community, including its physical infrastructure and the expression of its common identity in religious feasts and festivals.

For this Chapter, I relied mainly on the 1997 survey, only for reasons of comparison or for clarification have I presented data from various other sources. In analysing quantitative data I may have gone beyond the limits of an anthropologist's boundary. However, such a presentation situates the study of Sankhu in a historical socio-economic context, which is rapidly changing. These changes have a profound impact on the more spiritual and symbolic representation of Sankhu society by the inhabitants of the town as will be shown in the following chapters. In the next chapter I shall discuss castes and *sī Guthi*, the funeral associations in Sankhu.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### FEATURES OF NEWAR CASTE AND RELIGION

#### Introduction

Present chapter depicts features of castes system and religious affiliations of people in the Newar society. It aims at presenting a brief account of all castes present in Sankhu and discussing their hierarchies and caste-bound duties in Sankhu. Religious affiliation is a complex phenomenon in Newar society as the Newars follow both Hinduism and Buddhism. The recent political change in Nepal may witness more transformation regarding castes and religion as the state has been declared a secular and caste based discriminations have made punishable.

An in-depth view on the castes of Sankhu is presented in this chapter with the support of the data I collected through the household survey and with the help of my field research and interviews in 1997, which will provide a clearer picture of Newar castes and their present situation. As it has been discussed, the root of the Newar caste system is the Hindu Varṇāśram, which divides the society into several hierarchical orders. But as already explained the hierarchical order of castes in Newar society is much more complicated than in others. The elaborate caste system of the Newar adds to the social complexity of the town. The different castes are independent but they are also interdependent in many ways. Since I have already discussed Newar caste structure in Chapter 3, I will concentrate only on castes in Sankhu. In this section, I shall attempt to explain caste distribution and caste-bound duties in Sankhu.

Although Sankhu is a small town, my survey shows that 22 castes exist there. These are: the Rājopādhyāy or Brahmin priests; the Buddhist priests (Vajrācārya); the married monks (Śākya); the astrologers and assistants of Brahmins (Joṣṭi); the traders and administrators (Śreṣṭha); the Malla person of mixed descent (Mallakhacarā); the farmers (Jyāpu); the potters (Prajāpati); the gardeners (Gathu); the funeral priests (Kāranjit); the barbers (Nau); the painters (Citrakār or Puṁ); the dyers (Ranjitkār or Chipā); the oil pressers (Sāymi); the blacksmiths (Kau); the palanquin carriers and trumpeters (Duiṁ); the horn blowers (Nāju); the butchers

(Nāy) and the musicians or tailors (Jogī) and musicians; the funeral priests (Danyā); the dholak players (Dom̐) and the cleaners or temple guardians (Dyolā). The traders (Śreṣṭha) are the largest caste in number. They are among the highest castes in Newar society, ranking second only to the Newar Brahmins. The Danyā, a funeral priest of the Jogī, which is also considered a sub-caste of the Jogī has the smallest number. During my 1997 survey only one Danyā woman of 77 years of age was left in Sankhu but with her death this caste has been extinguished in Sankhu. See Table 12 for the exact household numbers of different castes and their numbers in 1997.

**Table 12 Castes by households, persons and family size in 1997**

Castes	Number of Households	Number of Persons	Average Family size
Rājopādhyāy (Brahmin priests)	3	17	5,7
Vajrācārya (Buddhist priests)	37	206	5,6
Śākya or Bare (the goldsmith)	4	26	6,5
Jośī (the astrologers and priests)	18	91	5,1
Śreṣṭha (traders and administrators)	442	3202	7,2
Mallakhacarā (mixed descents)	28	170	6,1
Jyāpu (the farmers)	77	454	5,9
Kumhā or Prajāpati (potters)	11	60	5,5
Gathu (gardeners)	6	33	5,5
Chīpā or Ranjītkār (dyers)	15	91	6,1
Puṃ or Citrakār (Painters)	1	10	10,0
Nau (barbers)	10	78	7,8
Bhā or Kāranjit (funeral priests for high caste Newars)	5	34	6,8
Sāymi or Mānandhar (oil pressers)	25	170	6,8
Kau (blacksmiths)	1	11	11,0
Duiṃ (palanquin carriers, and trumpeters)	12	72	6,0
Nāju (horn blower)	3	30	10,0
Nāy (butchers and musicians)	48	322	6,7
Jogī (tailor and musician)	19	127	6,7
Danyā (funeral priests for Jogī)	1	1	1,0
Dom̐ (dholak players)	12	73	6,1
Dyolā (cleaners, guardians at temples)	11	62	5,6
Total	789	5340	6,81

The most prominent caste in Sankhu is the Śreṣṭha consisting of traders and administrators. Table 12 presents the exact number of households of different castes, and family size. With 442 households, Śreṣṭha are the largest group in town. Their total number is 3,202 or 59.96 per cent of total population of 5,340. The largest family in the town is also to be found among the Śreṣṭha with 23 members in a single household. The largest family size on average is of the Kau with 11.0 in Sankhu.<sup>1</sup>

Colin Rosser kindly provided me with rough material of the household survey he did in 1956. He found 24 Newar castes in Sankhu and assumed on average six persons per household in 756 households and estimated a population of 4,500. Similarly, in 1978, Zanen estimated the population at five thousand people. He believed that the population decreased because people shifted their businesses from Sankhu to Kathmandu when alternative trade-routes to Tibet were opened. In later years too, many people continued to move to Kathmandu or elsewhere for business and employment. Therefore, no significant increase in population was found when I conducted the household survey in 1997. Three castes recorded by Rosser, Ācāju, Tamba and Avāle, disappeared from Sankhu but all other castes remained more or less intact. Apparently, former Avāle families in Sankhu began to call themselves Maharjan and assimilated with the Jyāpu. Zanen listed seventeen castes and put Malla as Śreṣṭha sub-caste and Kumā as Jyāpu sub caste while he considered Nāju as an untouchable caste. He listed one Bhaṭṭa Brahmin, who had passed away when I conducted the survey. The caste distribution has not changed much when I compare their data with mine.

### **Hierarchy of the castes in Sankhu**

As we discussed above, the hierarchy of castes in Newar society is debatable. In the past, such distinctions sometimes played an intense role in Sankhu, but now they hold no meaning. Different castes eating together used to be a taboo in the past. Nowadays, no great restrictions can be seen. A great change has taken place recently, in that the castes who may accept water from each other, do not mind eating together any longer when they observe communal feasts like a marriage or other ritual initiation feasts. However, eating rice cooked in the kitchen of a lower caste still remains a taboo for many castes. Especially people from the old generation are most reluctant to eat cooked rice from other kitchens. The Syasyah find it impure to eat cooked rice from any other castes than own caste. In this regard Owens' observation concerning commensality is still relevant to certain extent. He categories them into three different levels: those with

whom one may share cooked rice (*jā cale jupim*) or members of the same caste, those who share only feast food (*bhvay cale jupim*) and those from whom one may not drink water (*la cale majupim*).<sup>2</sup> In Sankhu, accepting cooked rice from the Vajrācārya, is not common, even though they are respected as priests and are given the honorific term '*bijyāye*' as for Rājopādhyāy priests. Some Śreṣṭhas put the Vajrācārya lower in rank than their own caste. On the other hand the Vajrācārya priests do not accept cooked rice from the Śreṣṭhas. Still, most do agree that the Vajrācārya priests are high in rank and respected accordingly. Therefore, I find it appropriate to rank the Vajrācārya at the same level as the Rājopādhyāy priests as Gellner did for the whole Newar society.

The change of caste status from Jyāpu to Śreṣṭha i.e. for a Jyāpu to Śreṣṭha status is still unimaginable in Sankhu as is the case elsewhere in the Kathmandu Valley as Quigley and Webster stressed. Among the castes below the line of Syasyaḥ and above the "unclean" castes, the ranking is not without controversy, because each of them claims a higher position. The Malla Khacārā in Sankhu, classify the Jyāpu below them, while the Jyāpu consider the opposite as more correct. Both are strict about marriage relations. Between Prajāpati and Jyāpu there is no restriction left for inter-marriage or inter-dining. In the past, the former used to claim a higher position than the latter in Sankhu, the Bhā claim a higher position than Jyāpu, and so do the Gathu. However, such claims are not recognised by others. Most commonly, seven castes: Chipā, Bhā, Sāymi, Gathu, Nau, Kau and Duim, whose toenails are cut or ritually purified by the Nāy, are consider the same rank,<sup>3</sup> but claims and counter-claims on one's position in the system is common between these castes.

Although all these castes may claim a higher position to one another, today they still restrain from inter-marriage with other castes and endogamy is preferred. Among the younger generation, the conservative caste rules are rapidly vanishing, either because of school-education or of western influences. In 2000, for example, an "unclean" caste classmate (Nāy) was invited during a wedding feast at a Śreṣṭha's house and he was allowed to sit in the same row as the others. In the past such an event could have disrupted the entire feast or could have had other bad consequences for the host family.

Zanen categorised the Nāju caste in Sankhu as a non-Newar caste but I consider this wrong, because there is no Nāju caste in the Parvate community. Although they permit a marriage with the Parvate Kuwar caste, it is wrong to call them Parvate because of their ritual duties and their assimilation in Newar society, including the acceptance of the Newar language as their mother tongue. In the past, they were considered an

unclean caste and were not permitted to fetch water from the wells. Now, no such restrictions are left for them.

Chart 6 Hierarchy of castes in Newar Society

I. The topmost castes	
The Rājopādhyāy (Dyo Brahmū) or Hindu Brahmin priests	The Vajrācārya or the Buddhist priests and the Śākya (Bare) or married monks and goldsmith
II. The high castes Syasyaḥ (the Joṣī or astrologers and assistant priests, Pradhān, Māske, Rājbandari and the Śreṣṭha or the traders and administrators)	
III. The middle ranking castes The Thaku Malla (Khacarā) or mixed descendants of the Malla The Jyāpu (Dangol, Siṃ, Suvāl and Kisāni) or farmers The Kumhā (Prajāpati) or the potters	
IV. The clean lower castes The Gathu or gardeners The Chipā (Ranjitkār) or dyers The Puṃ (Citrakār) or painters The Nau or barbers The Bhāḥ (Kāranjit) or funeral priests for high caste Newars The Sāymi (Mānandhar) or the oil pressers The Kau or blacksmiths The Duiṃ or palanquin carriers, trumpeters The Nāju or horn blowers	
V. The unclean lower Castes The Nāy or butchers The Jogi or tailor and musician, the Doṃ or drum ( <i>dholak</i> ) players The Danyā or funeral priests for Jogi	
VI. The unclean and untouchable (the lowest castes) The Dyolā (Po) or cleaners and guardians of mother goddesses	

Among the three unclean castes: the Nāy, Jogi, and Doṃ, it is common for each to claim the higher status, but generally higher castes consider the Nāy first in this ranking order, then the Jogi and the Doṃ. The Dyolā are considered the lowest Newar caste in Sankhu and there are no Cyāmkhalah and Hālāhulu castes in Sankhu. However, Dyolā in Sankhu talk about Cyāmkhalah and Hālāhulu as their subordinates because they do not want to find themselves at the bottom of the hierarchy.

To simplify the hierarchical order of castes in Sankhu, I take the pyramid model of six blocks presented by Gellner. I consider this model



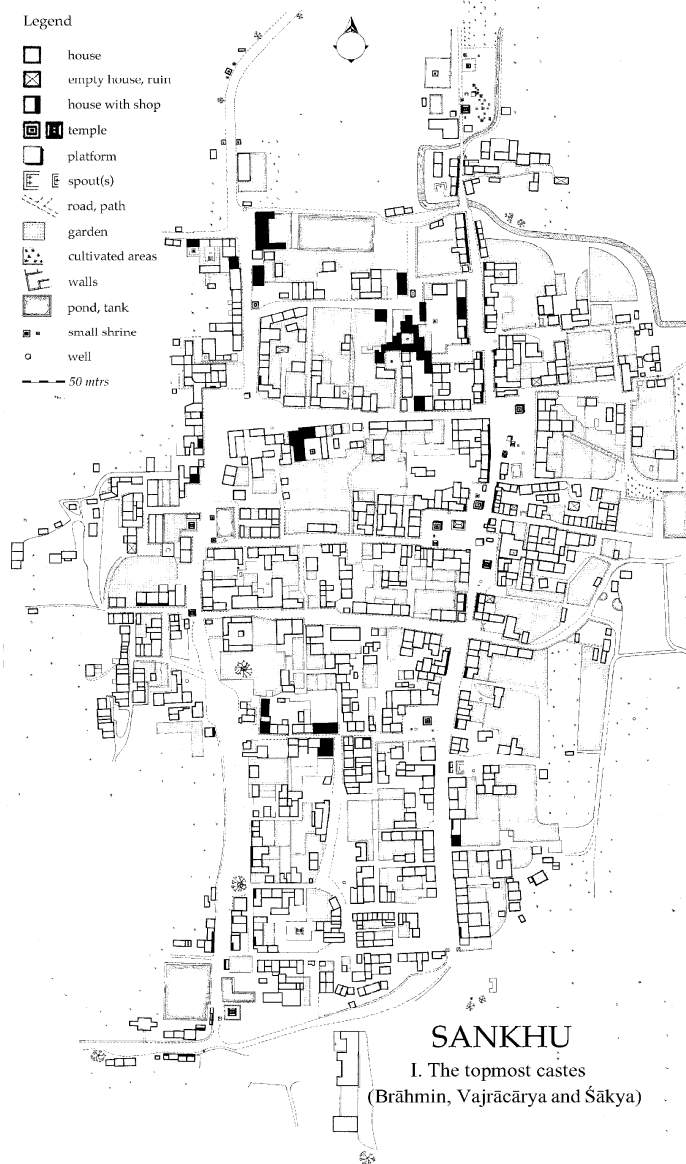
appropriate to the traditional hierarchies of caste division in this town too. Sankhu castes presented by Zanen also come close to this model. Rankin also presented this model for castes in Sankhu.<sup>4</sup> For the approximate ranking of the castes in Sankhu in six blocks see the listing in the chart. As in other settlements, the general ranking order in Sankhu is not indisputable. The classification of “topmost,” “high,” “middle,” “lower,” “unclean” and “untouchable” and their ranking order however is based on the concept of high caste Newars in the town:

I will present a brief account of all the castes present in Sankhu including their traditional duties and the contemporary changes that took place in recent years.

### **The Rājopādhyāy (Newar Brahmin priests)**

The performance of priestly duties in Sankhu is shared among extended families of the Brahmins of Patan, so every year a Patan Brahmin family visits Sankhu.<sup>5</sup> However, the families can delegate or sell their duties to their cousins, so the Brahmins who are living in Sankhu sometimes perform the duties of others as well as their own. Another Rājopādhyāy priest who worked in Sankhu in the early 1970s also performed priestly duties. He was married to a local Śreṣṭha woman. He passed away in 1999 and left two sons from his Śreṣṭha wife, but they are not eligible to take over his priestly tasks because they are the children from a non-Brahmin wife.

The Rājopādhyāy priests perform many rituals for the high caste Newars, especially for the Śreṣṭhas, including life cycle rituals and death rituals as well as the worship of gods and fire sacrifices. The Rājopādhyāys are also the guardians and priests of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, whose statue is kept in the residence of a Rājopādhyāy priest, except in the month of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival in January and February. They are invited for most life cycle and death related rituals.



Map 7

### The Vajrācārya or Gubhāju (Buddhist priests)

The Vajrācārya are the Buddhist priestly caste ranked equally to Hindu Rājopādhyāy priests in Newar society. They are also called Gubhāju, a word, which is derived from Gurubhāju, Gurubharādju or Gutabahāju (Manandhar 1986:48) and Lienhard 1996:248). Many people also believe that the word Gubhāju is derived from the word Gumbhāju or noble man of the forest, because the Vajrācārya are believed to have originally come from the forest monastery, Gumbāhāh, the present-day's Vajrayoginī sanctuary. The Vajrācārya are believed to have come to Kathmandu and elsewhere from Gumbāhāh. Every year many Vajrācārya of Kathmandu and Patan still visit Vajrayoginī and worship Jogeśvar as their lineage deity (Kula dyo).

The Vajrācāryas in Sankhu claim that they are the descendants of Vācāsiddhi, whom the legend Maṇisāila Mahāvādāna describes as the first priest of the goddess Vajrayoginī. MMC and MMC-I, provide a genealogy of the Vajrācāryas in Sankhu, and show that the Vajrācāryas originally used to live in the forest monastery of Gumbāhāh and later moved to Sankhu. The manuscript supplies names of 29 successive generations of Vajrācāryas from Vācāsiddhi onwards and tells that in the year 1528 (NS 648) during the time of Jñānadeva, the 23rd generation moved to Sankhu. Since many scholars have already discussed the Vajrācāryas, I shall concentrate on the Sankhu Vajrācāryas only.<sup>6</sup>

There are 37 households of Vajrācāryas in Sankhu and their number is 206 in total. All the Vajrācāryas in Sankhu assume they have a common ancestor, whose descendants later split into six branches. However, as one of these disappeared long ago, now only five branches of Vajrācāryas are left. In each branch there are several sub-branches.

The name of the *guthi* continues to be '*khucupā* or 'turn of six branches,' because its members used to come from those six branches and still believe that only these branches in Sankhu are the true descendants of a common ancestor. The five elders or *nyāmha thakāli* are the oldest men of each of the five main branches of Vajrācāryas. These five elders are supposed to be the representatives of Pañca Buddha, the five Buddhas,<sup>7</sup> whose presence is necessary in all major Buddhist ritual activities. At present, there are seven groups of Buddhist priests to be found in Sankhu, but two of them are excluded on many occasions, because they are believed to be the offspring of married-out daughters of the Sankhu Vajrācāryas who settled in Sankhu at a later date than the others. All seven branches, however, take turns to guard the Vajrayoginī temple.

To carry out major ritual activities in Sankhu the Vajrācārya priests are associated with many *guthi*: *khucupā guthi*, *jātrā guthi*, *Nepāhājā guthi* and *gātilā dhalamdanegu guthi*. Besides being temple priests the Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu are also household priests for almost all the “clean” castes from whom “water can be accepted” (*lah cale jupim*). However, not all the Vajrācārya families in Sankhu serve as family priests, because it is not a rewarding job from a financial point of view. From my survey it appeared that 190 families in Sankhu used only Vajrācārya priests for their domestic rites, while 378 families used both priests depending upon the ceremonies. Already in 1956/7 when Rosser conducted fieldwork in Sankhu, he noted the trend of shifting from Vajrācārya to Brahmin priests, but this trend did not continue to the extent people expected.

Most families in Sankhu invite Vajrācārya priests to preside over the worship of Vajrayoginī and for other general religious activities relating to different deities. These priests also perform sacrificial worship. From the 1997 survey it appeared, that they are employed for several life cycle and death-related rituals. They serve as priest to perform all rituals related to death just like the Brahmins. Before the dead body is carried away for cremation, a Vajrācārya priest may be invited to recite a text to pacify misfortune (*durgatipariśodhana*). Unlike the Brahmin priests they do not recite Garuḍapurāṇa. They are invited to consecrate food offered on the seventh day after death. In the past, people used to employ Karmācārya or Ācāju for the eleventh day’s house purification of death (*ghahsu*), i.e., the fire sacrifice, but since there is no Karmācārya left in Sankhu, people began to replace them either by the Vajrācārya or by the Jośī priests.

### **The Śākya or Bare (married monks and goldsmiths)**

In the past the Śākyas were the Buddhist monks who later turned into householder monks as they were forced to marry during the reign of king Jaysthiti Malla. They are also called Śākyabhikṣu, or Śākya monks, and ‘Bare’, a word derived from Sanskrit ‘Vande’ or the honourable monks. Both Śākya and Vajrācārya associate with one of the monasteries.<sup>8</sup> They are the smallest group in Sankhu with only four households numbering in total 26. Two families who migrated to Kathmandu still keep their ancestors’ property in Sankhu and return for their ritual initiations. Among the four families only one has a goldsmith shop in Sankhu while those who migrated to Kathmandu own goldsmith shops there. For the Śākyas in Sankhu there is only one monastery (*bāhāh*) in the Ipātāl-quarter where their children are initiated. Most of the Śākya in Sankhu do not follow their traditional goldsmith occupation, but become motor drivers,

schoolteachers or bankers. Some of them have begun new businesses like a pharmacy or the wholesale trade of tea. Śākya caste members marry only with Śākya and Vajrācārya but not with any other Newar caste. They are among the Buddhist priestly castes in Newar society, but they are not eligible to perform priestly duties. However, people use honorific words to address them as they do for Vajrācārya and Rājopādhyāy priests. They join Vajrācārya priests during Guṃlābājam excursions during the month of Guṃlā and also join them to beg alms on the day of Pañjārām.

### **The Jośī (assistant priests and astrologers)**

The Jośī is one of the higher Newar castes immediately below the Brahmin and equal to the Śreṣṭha. The Jośī are considered to have sprung from Brahmin-Śreṣṭha marriages. They do not have their separate *sī Guthi* but join the Śreṣṭhas. They prefer to marry with Jośī from other Newar settlements but also intermarry with the Śreṣṭhas. The total number of Jośī in Sankhu is 91 with eighteen households. They are also the traditional astrologers, but in Sankhu, only two families work as astrologers. They make horoscopes and provide astrological assistance to people, especially to find auspicious dates and times. In Newar society one's horoscope is made right after birth.

The Jośīs are also assistant priests to the Rājopādhyāy priests in performing life cycle rituals and the *śrāddha* ritual. Most Jośī families in Sankhu do not perform the duties of assistant priests anymore. At present, only two Jośī families are performing these duties. One of these two performs during rituals related to the Taleju temple in Sankhu.

During the 1997 survey 33 Jośī were employed in government offices, banks, and schools in Sankhu. Seven were engaged in the business sector, nine in agriculture and 21 were students. Some of the Jośī families in Sankhu are disqualified to receive ritual initiation (*dikṣā*) because of their marriage with lower than their own caste while other Jośī preferred not to be initiated, because they found it a burden. Those Jośī priests without ritual initiation are not supposed to perform the duties of assistant priest.

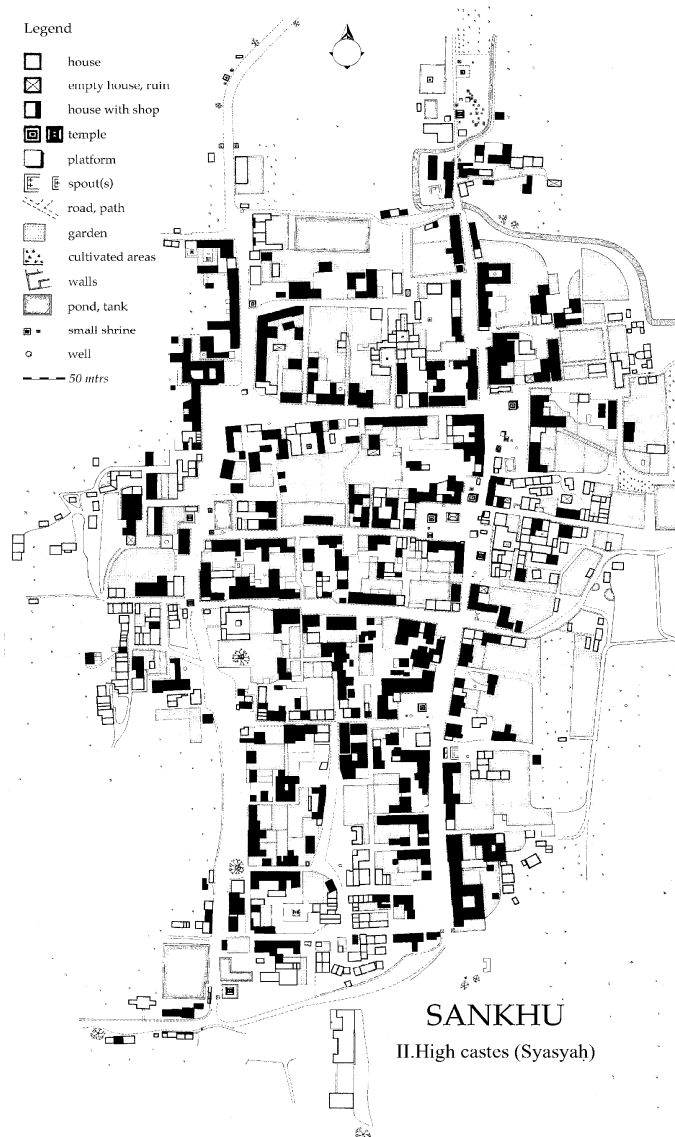
### **The Śreṣṭhas or Syasyaḥ (traders, shopkeepers and administrators)**

Śreṣṭha is a Sanskrit word adopted by the Newar high caste Syasyaḥ. Śreṣṭha simply means the best or excellent. Although many Syasyaḥ began to adopt the word Śreṣṭha as their caste name as early as the eighteenth century, it has become more common from the 1950s. In the past, they

used their clan names (*kunām*) or nicknames (*benām*), which was a common practice. Śreṣṭhas were known only by their nicknames in the past. All of the Śreṣṭha families have nicknames in Sankhu and they are still known by these names. However, many find it embarrassing to use these names. According to the late Baikuntha Prasad Lakaul, a Newar academician, Newar families used to receive nicknames from their society. He said that when an absurd incident took place in a family, that family began to be known by that incident.<sup>9</sup>

In Newar society the Śreṣṭhas are ranked below the priestly caste Rājopādhyāy Brahmin. It is believed that the word Śreṣṭha is derived from the Newar word Syasyaḥ which itself is derivation of a Sanskrit word Śyeṣṭa. The first use of the word Śyaṣṭa is found in the oldest chronicle of Nepal, the Gopālārājavaṃśāvalī, which dates from fourteenth century. The translators of the text spelled this word as Śreṣṭha.<sup>10</sup> When exactly the word Śreṣṭha was popularised among the Newars, is still a matter of discussion.

Although there are no exact data about Newar castes for the whole of Nepal, the Śreṣṭha are believed to be the second largest in number after the Jyāpu. In Sankhu, they are the largest group with 442 households and 3,202 people. Among Newar castes, the Śreṣṭha are the most controversial, because of the unclear hierarchies amongst them. Colin Rosser, who did research among the Newars, noted four or five ambiguous levels of Śreṣṭha, namely Chatharī, Pāṃcatharī, Cārtharī and Sāretintharī.<sup>11</sup> However, many scholars who conducted research among the Newars in later years refuted his supposition. Among them is Quigley who discussed the Śreṣṭha caste at length.<sup>12</sup> The notion of Chatharī and Pāṃcatharī division is still heard in Sankhu, but a hierarchical distinction between them is not to be found anymore. Among the Śreṣṭha, to claim oneself Chatharī Śreṣṭha (the highest) and to point to others as Pāṃcatharī Śreṣṭha (lower), is a longstanding tradition. Especially when marriages were arranged these claims were heard. Once the marriage was settled, such claims calmed down. In the past, many stories were heard in Sankhu that once such and such a family's daughter was married to a low graded Śreṣṭha and that she was denied access to the kitchen of her own parental home, or the other way that she was denied access to her husband's kitchen. Today, this kind of story is not heard anymore in Sankhu. Some of the Śreṣṭha in Sankhu have marriage relations with Śreṣṭha of Dhulikhel, Dolkhā, Tauthali, Tokhā and Thimi but in general, such relations are still a taboo, as the Śreṣṭhas of these Newar settlements are considered low graded.



Map 8

*Sī Guthi* membership can be considered one of the criteria to distinguish status differences between the Śreṣṭha, but all the existing Śreṣṭha *sī Guthi* in Sankhu are flexible enough to accept members from other *sī Guthi*. Sons not living with their parents may join *sī Guthi* of their own choice rather than that of their fathers.

In practice, there is no barrier left among the Śreṣṭhas as far as marriage or inter-dining is concerned. Māske, Rājbandarī and Prādhān are also lumped together with the Śreṣṭha in Sankhu because they share *sī Guthi* membership with the Śreṣṭhas. However, I have presented separate data for Joṣī although they share their *sī Guthi* memberships with the Śreṣṭha and have marriage relations with them, because they serve as assistant priests together with the Rājopādhyāy priests in performing domestic rituals. However, the Joṣīs are considered to be equal to the Śreṣṭha in caste rank.

Most Śreṣṭhas in Sankhu are traders or shopkeepers running wholesale or retailer shops, rice mills and transportation services. With an increasing number of educated among them, the number of employees in governmental and non-governmental organisations, banks, schools, universities, industries and private sectors is increasing year after year. The Śreṣṭha hold the largest area of land (67.3%) in Sankhu, which is but natural because they are the most numerous in the town. They are tilling their own land while they also own a big quantity of land tilled by other tenants in Sankhu and surrounding villages. Most of the Śreṣṭha families in Sankhu have more than one occupation, which makes it difficult to place them in one category.

Traditionally, Śreṣṭha are the patrons of many of the rituals performed in Sankhu, therefore their role is very important in the town. The Śreṣṭha are responsible to perform or organise many rituals and processions of gods and goddesses in the town. This will be clear from my discussion on socio-religious associations in the town in the following chapter. Because of their capability of patronising many socio-religious rituals, they are the most influential caste in town. All other castes are in one or another way dependent or subordinate to them except the Rājopādhyāy Brahmins and Vajrācārya priests. The network of inter-caste relationships in the town circles around the Śreṣṭha. Both the Rājopādhyāy and the Vajrācārya provide priestly services to them in their various domestic rituals and acts of worship, while Joṣī attend to them as astrologers and priests. The Nau serve them as nail cutters and barbers, the Jyāpu as labourers, the Gathu as flower suppliers, and the Jogi as food collectors offered to the deceased and as musicians. Finally, the Nāy act for them as meat suppliers and Dyolā serve them as cleaners. Bhā who used to serve them as funeral



priests accepting food offered to the deceased have stopped their duties in recent times. Similarly, the Kisāni have stopped serving them by burning their dead bodies.

### **The Malla Khacarā or Thaku (Malla person of mixed descendant)**

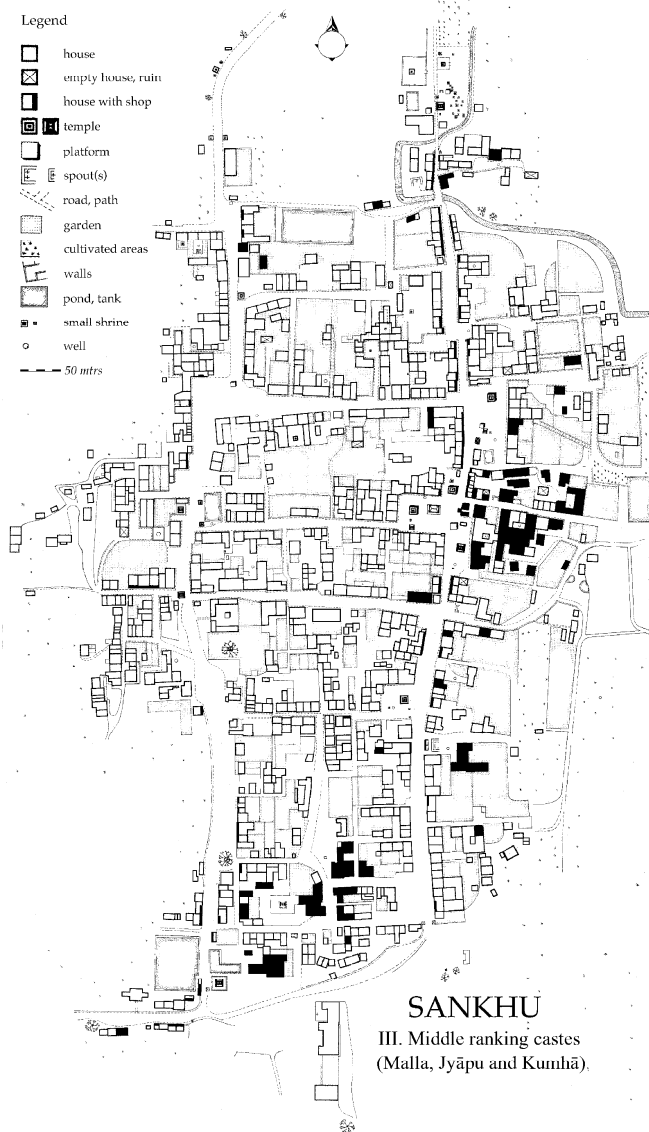
In the past, the Mallas in Sankhu used to be called Lavat or Thaku Lavat.<sup>13</sup> They are also known as Khacarā or mixed person of descent. However, nowadays they begin to be called Malla and find it derogatory to be called Khacarā or Thakhu. They claim that their forefather was a son of Ranajit Malla, the last Malla king of Bhaktapur, from his illegitimate (*mathyā*) wife, who fled from Bhaktapur.

There are 28 households of the Malla in Sankhu and their number was 170 in 1997. Since the Mallas in Sankhu believe they are the descendants of a single ancestor, they do not intermarry in Sankhu. Their lineage deity Manamāneśvarī is in Hadigaon in Kathmandu. She is also the lineage deity for all the descendants of former Malla and Shah kings. This too makes them claim to be the descendants of former Malla kings.

The primary occupation of all the Mallas in Sankhu is agriculture, but they are also engaged in various professions, such as bricklayer, straw mat producer, teacher, government employee, retailer, rice seller, etc. They find their marriage partners in other Newar settlements and a few of them marry the Jyāpus from Sankhu, but traditionally the Śreṣṭhas and other high caste Newars do not generally marry. When a woman from the Malla married a Rājopādhyāy, he was heavily criticised and some of the Śreṣṭha families did not want him as a priest any longer. Therefore, except for elopements, the Mallas in Sankhu seek marriage partners outside Sankhu. Most of them invite the Vajrācārya priests to serve them but some have begun to replace them by Brahmins. Malla do not have ritual duties vis-à-vis other castes.

### **The Jyāpus (farmers)**

The Jyāpus or Maharjans are one of the important Newar castes whose number is the largest among the Newar in the Valley. They are also believed to be the oldest inhabitants of the Valley.<sup>14</sup> The Jyāpu are the second largest group in Sankhu comprising 77 households with a population of 454. They use Maharjan, Daṃgol, Siṃ, Suvāl, Kisānī and Gorkhālī as their family names in Sankhu.



Map 9

Traditionally, all of them are farmers. The Kisānī sub-caste of the Jyāpu used to take care of the cremations for all the high caste Newars in Sankhu. They made the bier, carry the fire for the funeral pyre and burn the corpses. However, they have abandoned all these duties in the recent past.

Gorkhālī families in Sankhu are considered to be Jyāpu because of their marriage relations with the Jyāpu in the past. They also share *sī guthi* membership with the Jyāpu. All the Jyāpu households in Sankhu occupy land but they own only 8.5 percent of the total area available for agriculture. Most Jyāpu families also keep domestic animals like sheep, cows and goats. Both their men and women are active in day labour work on others' fields during harvesting and sowing times. Nowadays, Jyāpu in Sankhu are engaged in various jobs besides farming such as in banking jobs, administration, postal services and businesses like retail shops. Some are employed as bus drivers, motor mechanics or as electrical mechanics.

The Jyāpus are considered to be a middle ranking caste just below Śreṣṭha and traditionally they marry within their own sub-castes, Malla Thaku and Kumā. Śreṣṭha do not accept them as marriage partners because they find them lower than their own caste. Although a few Jyāpu families began to use Brahmins as their family priests, most of them are retaining Vajrācārya priests. For the Kisānī subcaste of Jyāpu, the Vajrācāryas stopped their priestly services because the former stopped their traditional occupation of cremating corpses. The Rājopādhyāy Brahmin also refused their request to take over priestly tasks, so they were forced to employ Parvate Brahmins from Gāṃsulī for their domestic rituals. The Jyāpus also serve as messenger for the Śreṣṭha on different occasions such as for marriage and other rituals. From my survey, it appeared that Śreṣṭha families employed Jyāpus as messengers during birth purification (*macābu byamke*), during Kaytā pūjā, during marriages and during old age ceremony (*jamko*).

### **The Kumā or Prajāpati (potters)**

There are eleven families of potters in Sankhu with a population of 60. Their traditional occupation is pottery but apart from one family that migrated to Sankhu from Thimi in the 1980s none of the potters in Sankhu is engaged in their traditional occupation. They are mainly agriculturists and traders. They marry the Jyāpu in Sankhu traditionally, which is not common in other Newar settlements. Their priests are Vajrācārya.

### **The Gathu (gardener)**

There are six gardener families (Gathu) in Sankhu. It seems that the Gathu of Sankhu, immigrated from Bhaktapur and their number is 33. They trace their ancestors to Bhaktapur and occasionally they join in the famous annual Navadurgā dance in Bhaktapur. The Gathu caste is considered to be a low but clean Newar caste. Gardening is their traditional duty, but in Sankhu they have abandoned this occupation for some time. At present, only one Gathu woman supplies flowers to high caste Newar, for which she receives raw rice and sometime festive food (*bhavya*) during major festivals. Unlike Kathmandu, there is no market to sell flowers in Sankhu. Also, it is not considered dignified work, and it does not pay very well.

In Sankhu, the Gathu engage in various other occupations. Although, all of them have some land to cultivate the production is not sufficient for their food consumption. They own 25 *ropanī* of land or 0.4 percent of the total area. In the past, it used to be an unprofitable occupation, because they had to pay rent to their landlords. The 1964 land reform programme granted more rights to farmers and today they make more profit from the land. Some Gathu also engage in unskilled labour, manual work, business, and work in government services. Some of the Gathu families are also messengers for the Śreṣṭha caste in Sankhu.

Traditionally, the Gathu in Sankhu marry Gathu from Bhaktapur, Thimi or elsewhere. In the recent past a Śreṣṭha woman from Thāgām eloped with a Sankhu Gathu while a Sherpā girl from Helambu eloped with another Gathu from Sankhu. Their children are assimilated in the fathers' caste. One of the daughters of a Gathu man who married a Śreṣṭha fell in love with a local Śreṣṭha and she married in 2000. On this occasion, the Gathu man organised a public wedding feast and on the invitation cards he announced himself as a Śreṣṭha. This was the first instant in Sankhu that a Gathu man publicly claimed to be a Śreṣṭha. Some Śreṣṭha people who were embarrassed about this wedding turned down the invitation. Nevertheless, many did attend the marriage feast.

### **The Chipā or Ranjitrkār (dyers)**

Chipā are the traditional dyer caste of the Newars. In the past, all Chipā families in Sankhu were engaged in dyeing cloth. They always used to occupy the open space in the Calākhu quarter to dry coloured cloths in the sun. Until as late as the early 1980s, at least three Chipā families in Sankhu were still practicing this dyeing occupation. They used to get orders for dyed cloths not only from local businessmen but also from

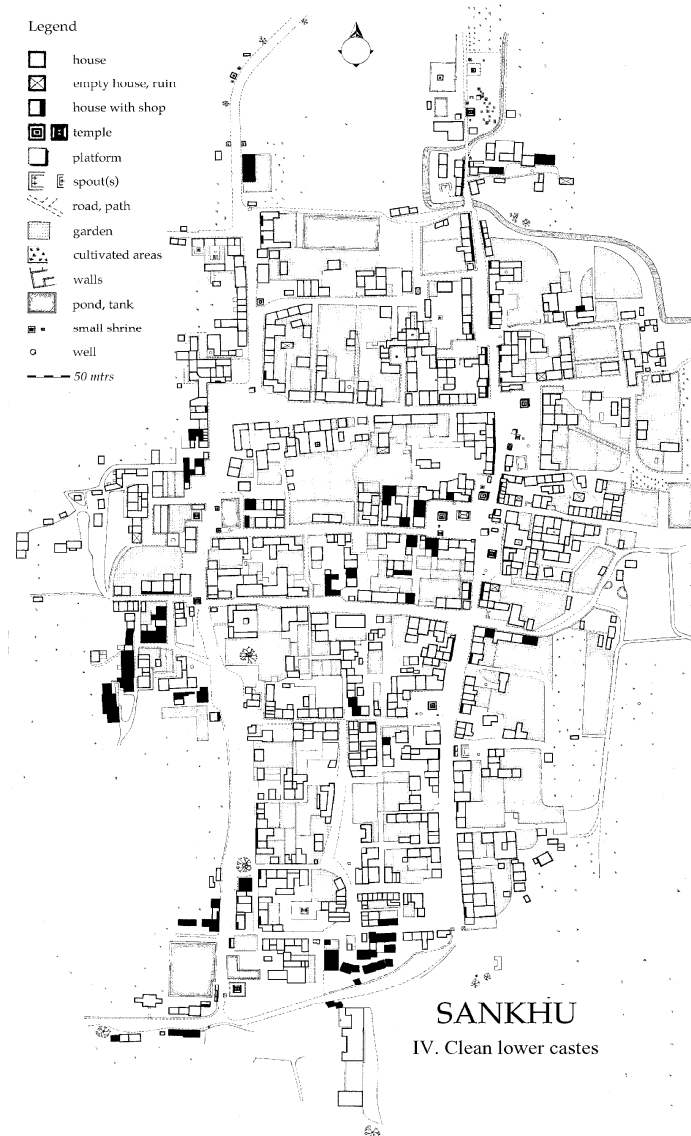
businessmen in Kathmandu and elsewhere. However, with the appearance of modern textiles in the market, they had to give up their traditional job because they failed to compete with modern technology. At present, none of the fifteen Chipā dyeing workshops in Sankhu are operational. The old generation now mainly depends on farming or on wage labour while the younger, educated generation finds work in Kathmandu.

One family has started a retail shop selling cosmetics, vegetables and other daily necessities in Sankhu, and one family has a rice mill, while others remain unemployed. During the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival, two Chipā families serve as guardians of two different religious spots on the banks of Śālinadī, namely Candrāvātī and Navarāj, both figures from the legend Svasthānī.

At first, only one family began as the guardian of Candrāvātī, later another family erected a stone with the image of Navarāj and began to guard it. Both families are making a good income from the offerings made by the pilgrims during the festival month. All the Chipā families in Sankhu are believed to be descendants of a single ancestor, so they seek their marriage partners from other settlements. All of them employ Vajrācārya as their priests, but two of them also use Brahmin.

### **The Citrakār or Puṃ (Painters)**

The Citrakārs or Puṃ are one of the occupational castes in Newar society. They are the traditional painters<sup>15</sup> and paint icons on different occasions and sell them. During the various festivals they also have painting duties. In Sankhu, there is only one family of Citrakār. Its major duty is to paint eight auspicious signs (*aṣṭamangala*) on the walls of the god's rest house during the Vajrayoginī festival (March/April). They also do the yearly paintings of the masks of the Devī dancers in Sankhu (in September), and the remoulding of the masks in case the old ones become impossible to use. In addition, they paint the earthen jars (small and big) during the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival of the month Pōhelā (January/February), which are used as a holy jar (*kalaśa*). Those who order the work pay the Citrakār in cash. The painting of the divine serpents (*nāga*), on the occasion of the Nāgapañcamī festival (August), of the goddess Durgā during the Dasain festival (Sept./Oct.), of Lakṣmī for the Lakṣmī pūjā festival (October) and the paintings of images of other gods and goddesses to sell are also their traditional duties. The painting is done on paper and sold on certain occasions to people. They also paint for individuals upon their request; such as the eight auspicious signs on the sides of the main entrance of the houses during marriages. However, not the Citrakār from Sankhu but those



Map 10

of Kathmandu are invited for the twelve-yearly repainting of Vajrayoginī (Lampuchāyegu).

According to a Vajrācārya priest, the fact that the Citrakār from Kathmandu are invited is a matter of tradition. The only Citrakār family in Sankhu possesses eight *ropanī* of land, which is 0.1 percent of the land occupied by different castes in Sankhu. The family's head has three married sons. The father has trained them in the traditional knowledge of art and painting.

However, he is not sure whether they will continue the traditional duties, because all of them are busy in various other fields: one is a politician, the other is businessman and the third is a teacher. The eldest brother of the head of the Citrakār family now lives in Kathmandu, and he has no children of his own. So the head of the family thinks there is little chance of continuation of their traditional duties in Sankhu. Since they form only one family, they have no *sī guthi* (funeral association) of their own, but belong to the Citrakār *sī guthi* in Bhaktapur. It is true that it is not possible for the *guthi* members of Bhaktapur to come and take care of the funeral duties in case of a family member's death. To maintain their social identity they are members of the Bhaktapur funeral association. Their main family priest is Vajrācārya, but occasionally they also employ Brahmin priest.

### The Nau (barbers)

The Naus are among the occupational Newar castes and are considered low but clean. Their traditional occupation is to cut toenails and shave heads for high caste Newars including Jyāpu, Kumā and Thaku Malla during major festivals and at the time of performing life cycle and death rituals. Cutting toenails is significant in Newar society because it indicates the social rank of a person. The Nau cut toenails for each other. For other lower clean castes Nāy ladies serve as toenail cutters. Among the ten Nau families in Sankhu, seven still continue their traditional duties while three of them are engaged in other occupations. Each of these families have a certain number of families as clients, who pay them annually a certain quantity of grain and feed them during all major festivals and at the time of performing any domestic rituals. The Nau also charge cash in certain cases; depending upon the occasion. In 1997, during the *Ihi* ceremony in Sankhu, each girl was charged five rupees for a symbolic toenail chipping. At a Kaytā pūjā ceremony a Nau charged 500 rupees for shaving a head. Only one Nau family has a barber's shop in Sankhu but all seven provide this service at private homes and at their patron's homes. Some of them

have taken of other jobs, such as electricians and drivers. Their total number in Sankhu is 78.

All the Nau in Sankhu invite Vajrācārya for their domestic rituals. The 1997 survey shows that the Nau families were providing barber services during life cycle and death rituals to the above-mentioned Newar castes. Recently three barbers from India began their shops in Sankhu, which is a new challenge for the local barbers.

### **The Bhā or Kāranjit (funeral priests for high caste Newars)**

Bhā are believed to be the descendants of Brahmin priests, who lost their status because of ritual duties. As funeral priests their role is important in Newar society. They are also called Mahābrāhmana or the great Brahmin, even though they are considered to be far below the Brahmins in the caste hierarchy.<sup>16</sup> This is because they accept gifts (*dāna*) of the dead person. In Newar society they are invited to accept the food consisting of eleven ingredients in the name of death (*eghāraghāsā*). A married daughter prepares and offers two portions of food in the name of the deceased on the tenth night. These food portions are kept a whole night locked in a room of the house of the deceased who is believed to eat from it. The next day, early in the morning, one portion of food is handed over to a Bhā and another to a Jogi. The food handed over to Bhā is called *eghāraghāsā*. To the Bhā is also given a pair of cloth and some money as fee (*dakṣiṇā*). Since the offering of food and cloth to the Bhā take place during the impure mourning period, his duty is considered to be a low-graded one. In the early 1980s, the last Bhā was still accepting *eghāraghāsā* food, but after his death none of the five Bhā families in Sankhu accept *eghāraghāsā* food anymore. The Bhā caste found it insulting to accept *eghāraghāsā* food because it did not give them any social prestige. Since they stopped accepting *eghāraghāsā* food, people dispose the offered food on riverbanks.

Today, Bhā families in Sankhu are engaged in other jobs: teaching, technical and business jobs. Their women are also found working for the government, knitting sweaters and working as day wage labourers. All of them also own land. Their traditional marriage relations are with members of the same caste in other Newar settlements. A Bhā woman married one of the influential Śreṣṭhas in Sankhu, but their sons and daughters had to look for their marriage partners among the Bhā caste because no Śreṣṭha accepted them as equals despite their claim of being Śreṣṭha. Although the children born from a low caste woman with a high caste husband are



considered higher in status than the mother's caste they never equal their father's caste. Apart from one family, all the Bhā in Sankhu employ Vajrācārya as their priests.

### **The Sāymi or Mānandhar (the oil pressers)**

The Saymi is a low but pure Newar caste. The story is that they originally ranked as an unclean caste, but were upgraded in the Rana time, but there is no evidence to prove this story. There are 25 households of Sāymi in Sankhu and they are 170 in number. The traditional occupation of the Sāymi is to press oil. Till the 1960s there were two communal traditional mills in Sankhu and all the households had access to these oil mills. Till the late 1970s, one traditional oil-pressing mill was operating but it had to be closed down because it failed to compete with the new electric mills. At one time a Śreṣṭha family began with a modern oil mill in Sankhu but he failed to continue the business because of lack of customers. At present, there is a single Sāymi who is running an electric oil press mill in Sankhu but all others have adopted other occupations.

Most Sāymi families in Sankhu run unlicensed liquor and beverage shops (*bhatti*) as their main occupation. Two families run teashops, two run shops to sell daily necessities and one has a vegetable shop. A few are working as schoolteachers and some are engaged in government offices as clerks. For two consecutive terms, since 1992, Mankaji, a member of the Sāymi community, is serving as the chairman of the Pukhulāchi VDC in Sankhu. They also have been for many years active in social and voluntary work including the Newar language promotion activities through a forum called "Sāymi Dabū." This is the only organisation in Sankhu, which can be considered based on caste, while in other places like Kathmandu there are many caste-based organisations.

The Sāymis are active musicians in Sankhu and perform their music on different occasions. Especially their flutes, *dhā* and *dhāphā* are very popular and are played during major festivals and processions of deities in Sankhu. They observe the month of Guṃlā festival by carrying out the Guṃlābājam procession in Sankhu every morning.

### **The Kau (blacksmiths)**

There are only two Kau families in Sankhu and both continue their traditional occupation of blacksmith. Their number is sixteen.<sup>17</sup> Over time, they have received new tools and machines to satisfy customers' demands. An elder Kau serves as a mechanic at the minting office of His Majesty's

Government in Kathmandu. In Newar society, occupational castes like the Kau are considered to be lower castes, but not unclean or untouchable as in Parvate society. Their traditional marriage relationship is with the Kau from other Newar settlements. One Kau woman claims to be possessed by the goddess Hairitī and acts as a faith healer. In many Newar settlements more popularly such women are known as *dyomayju* or the mother goddess.

### **The Duim (palanquin carriers and trumpeters)**

In Sankhu there are twelve Duim families, who total 72 in number. Their traditional duty was to carry palanquins during marriages and other occasions, to blow trumpets (*kāhā*) during various festivals and to form part of funeral processions of high caste Newars. However, since the 1990s, the Duim caste has stopped performing the duties of blowing trumpets in funeral processions and at different festivals.<sup>18</sup> They also used to blow trumpets during the funeral processions of various high caste Newars in Sankhu, as well as during old age ceremonies (*jamko*), *pañcabali* (a ceremony of sacrificing five different animals to a certain deity sponsored by individuals or state). They stopped all the traditional duties because they did not consider these honourable, and brought them little financial or social rewards. Another reason is that, after the implementation of the 1964 land reform programme in Nepal, they had no income anymore from the land sanctioned for their duties and tilled by tenants. In the past, they used to have only one *sī Guthi*, but some years ago, this *sī Guthi* split into two. In the past they also had a *Guthi* to support the training of their children as trumpet players, but they folded up this *Guthi* when they stopped blowing trumpets.

The Duim families themselves own 49 *ropanī* of land (0.9%) and the old generation is still engaged in agriculture. Some of them used to produce beaten rice, which they had to abandon in recent years when electric machines took over this work. Those who own rice mills introduced such machines in Sankhu. The youths also have begun other occupations like teaching, contracting, carpentry and masonry (*dakaḥmi*). Some also serve as porters in Sankhu.

### **The Nāju (horn blowers)**

The Nāju in Sankhu are a Newar caste, only found in Sankhu. Because of their marriage relations with the Kuwar, of the Parvate caste, many people see them as a Parvate caste. However, they are fully integrated in the

Newar society in Sankhu and follow all Newar cultural customs. For instance they observe all the Newar festivals including Svanti. Inside the town their number is 30 comprising three families while another five families are living across the river Śālinadī in Pālubarī. In the past, they were considered to be an unclean caste, but nowadays, they are considered clean people from whom water can be accepted. Their traditional occupation was to blow horns to drive away spirits, but they do not perform this duty anymore. Their primary occupation is agriculture but they are also found practicing various other jobs

### **The Nāy (the butchers and musicians)**

The Nāy are one of the low castes. High caste Newars do not accept drinking water or any cooked or boiled food from their hands, but they do buy buffalo milk from them. The Nāy are the third largest group in Sankhu comprising 48 households and 322 persons in total. They are associated with three *sī guthis* in Sankhu. They also run other socio-religious *guthi* like the Bhīm dyo *guthi* and the Nāycā *pyākham guthi*. They employ Nāy Gubhāju or a butcher's priest from Patan for all their domestic rituals like marriages or *śrāddha*. Their major traditional occupations are to play *nāykhim* music and to sell buffalo meat and milk. Their music is crucial during several religious and ritual occasions. In the recent past they have abandoned playing music on several occasions such as in funeral processions. However, they continue playing their music on most religious occasions for which in return they are paid in kind or cash. They also farm pigs, which is considered untouchables' job and pig meat is considered impure by high caste Newars. Most of the Nāy in Sankhu continue their traditional occupation of killing buffaloes and selling meat. They run twenty meat shops in Sankhu. One of them has opened a poultry industry. Another Nāy has a photo studio in Sankhu. The Nāy celebrate all the feasts and festivals like other Newar castes. Some Nāy families are also running liquor and beverage shops (*bhatti*) for people of unclean and untouchable castes.

The Nāy women cut toenails of clean lower Newar castes. They also traditionally used to cut umbilical cords of newly born of high caste Newars. In the past, Nāy women used to carry straw to the cremation ground during the funeral procession of high caste Newars to be used for cremation. They have stopped this custom as soon as their male counterparts stopped playing funeral music. In the past, certain Nāy families used to have certain families as their patrons (*jajamān*), to whom they were obliged to provide these services.

### The Jogi or Kapālī (tailors and musicians)

The Jogis are one of the low and impure castes in Newar society. Therefore the so-called pure or high caste people do not accept water or any cooked food from them. The Jogis claim to be descendants of ascetics (hence their name), but are considered a low caste in Newar society. They believe that their ancestor was a Brahmin who renounced the world and became a *yogi*, but could not continue a *yogi*'s life and returned to mundane life. In this period as world renouncer he had to lose his clan (*gotra*). Therefore the Jogi remained clanless and became a separate caste. They do not offer cooked food to their ancestors (*bau bigu*) at home, but they offer uncooked rice to them at the tap where they take their morning bath because their ancestors do not accept cooked food from their hands. The Jogi are also the guardians of certain temples, and, in that capacity, are considered to be pure. People accept cooked food as blessings (*prasād*) or festive foods (*samaybaji*) from their hands when they are on duty as guardians. They themselves claim that they are superior to the butcher caste, but the butcher considers the Jogi to be inferior to them.<sup>19</sup>

There are nineteen Jogi families in Sankhu; their total number is 127. One of their traditional duties is to play music at temples and during festivals. Every morning, they play music at the temple of Vajrayoginī. They also perform music on other occasions, such as during the Vajrayoginī festival, Guṃlā, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, and other festivals. In most festivals they are obliged to play music by custom, while on many other occasions they are invited to play in return for some food and money. They also used to play music to mark the change of seasons, which they have stopped since 1995. Long ago, they received land from the government to perform their music. Now, with the change of times, they are much less willing to perform their music everywhere, as they consider their traditional duties disrespectful. Since the 1964 land reform granted them full right over their land, they no longer fear losing the land. They own 60 *ropanī* of land i.e., 1.0 percent of the total land in Sankhu.

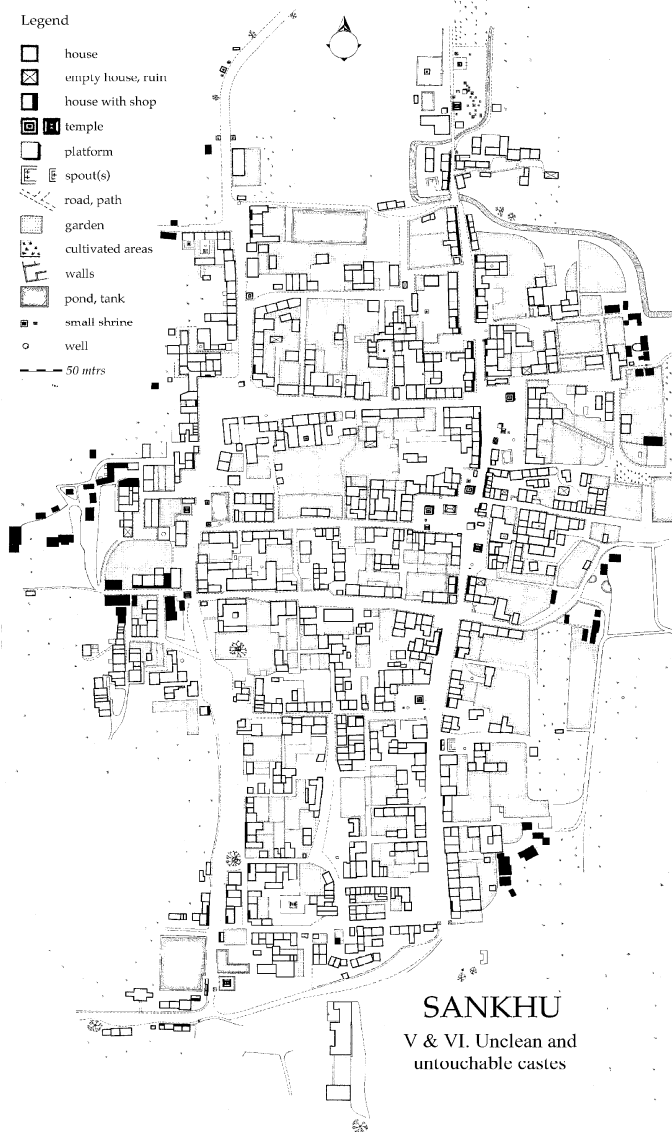
Another major traditional occupation of the Jogī is to receive *jogibvaḥ*, a portion of food from high caste Newar during different festivals and *śrāddha* of ancestors. *Jogibvaḥ* is a portion of food put separately on the top floor of the house to appease the deceased ancestors, but later handed over to the Jogī. During most festivals, *jogibvaḥ* is given to a Jogi only on the next day, but during a *śrāddha*, *jogibvaḥ* is given on the same day before any elder members in the household eat their food. *Jogibvaḥ* is also called the “death portion” (*sikbvaḥ*) as it is given to deceased ancestors. It is necessary to make the *jogibvaḥ* pure so that the *pitr*, accepts the food. On

the day of the *śrāddha* ritual or during any important festival, a first spoonful of whatever food is cooked, must go to the portion of *jogibvaḥ* before serving anybody. It is believed that the deceased ancestors must be appeased with the very purest food only. The Newars believe that, they gain prosperity in their present life and for their descendants as well by appeasing deceased ancestors.<sup>20</sup>



Plate 15 A caste-bound duty: the Jogi playing mvaḥālīm (August 1997).

In addition, it is the customary duty of the Jogi to accept *nhaynhumā*, cooked food offered to deceased people by their relatives on the seventh day after death. On such occasions both male and female Jogi can receive the food. In most other Newar towns and cities the Jogi have forsaken their traditional duties, but in Sankhu some of them are still continuing them. In Sankhu, the new generation disagrees with their parents about continuing the traditional caste duties. The eldest Jogi also said that their relatives from Kathmandu and other places are warning them to stop all traditional duties. If they don't they would stop all contacts with them. Therefore, some of them have forsaken their traditional duties like accepting *nhaynhumā* or *jogibvaḥ*. All the Jogis in Sankhu will discard their traditional duties sooner or later. However, they still continued to accept *jogibvaḥ* from two hundred to five hundred families.



Map 11

The Jogi's traditional marriage relation is only with the Jogi of other settlements while a few of them also have married inside Sankhu. A Śreṣṭha woman eloped with a Jogi from a neighbouring quarter of Jogi and lost her caste.

### **The Dom̐ (dholak player)**

The Dom̐ are sometimes considered to be one of the sub-castes of the Jogī.<sup>21</sup> However, they do not consider themselves to be so. They are also called Bādyakār while some have begun to be called Badi, not to be confused with the Badi ethnic group of Western Nepal. People also confused them with the Dhobi, or washer's caste, but Dhobi is a different Newar caste not to be found in Sankhu.

There are twelve Dom̐ families in Sankhu. According to the eldest Dom̐ of Sankhu, about 70 Dom̐ families live in Kathmandu Valley. About 50 houses of the Dom̐ are concentrated on the bank of Manaharā River on the way from Sankhu to Thimi, another Newar town situated southwest of Sankhu. In other places, their number is not significant and they are even about to disappear. In the cities of Kathmandu, Kirtipur, Golades (Paśupati), Bhaktapur, Nālā, Cāṃgu and in Thimī, there is one family left at present, and in Patan only two families are found.<sup>22</sup> In the past, one Dom̐ family used to live in Banepā and one in Vā (Cāpāgāum), but they passed away. According to the eldest Dom̐ of Sankhu, Dom̐ caste people, nowadays, are not willing to identify with any other caste, because they would find it derogatory to do so.

In Sankhu, the Dom̐ used to have *sī Guthi* but it disintegrated some twenty years ago. First, it was split into two, later, both failed to maintain any *Guthi*. Thus today there is no *sī Guthi* of the Dom̐ caste in Sankhu.

However, when somebody dies within their caste, they come together to carry out the funeral procession. Only one Dom̐ family in Sankhu performs caste-bound duties of playing the *dholak* (a kind of drum) together with a team of Jogī musicians. No other families perform this task, and the eldest Dom̐ denied it to be their caste duty, although he agreed that in Nālā, Kirtipur and in Cāṃgu, Dom̐ families still play the *dholak*. The eldest Dom̐ claimed that their caste is higher than that of the Jogi, Nāy and Dyolā and that they do not intermarry with these caste groups. According to him, they either marry within their own caste or they marry with any higher caste. Most of them are nowadays engaged in business or agriculture. The Dom̐ families possess 47 *ropanī* of land or 0.8 percent of the total land.

### **The Danyā (funeral priests for the Jogi)**

During my survey in 1997 only a widow of 77 years of age was left of the Danyā caste. As her son died some years ago, she was the last surviving Danyā in Sankhu. Her son was married to a girl of the same caste from Kathmandu, but she left him after giving birth to a daughter, whom she took together with her. The Danyā can be considered a subcaste of the Jogi caste. They were as impure Newar caste of tailors and musician. The old widow was a member of the Jogi *sī Guthi*. During the *sī Guthi* feasts she was treated inferior. Yet, funeral duties were performed by the same *Guthi* when her family members died. Their main god is Gorakhanātha, who is also the main god for the Jogi. In other places like Kathmandu and Patan, the Danyā caste marries people from the Jogi caste.

There are only a few Danyā families left in the Kathmandu Valley. In other parts of the Valley, Danyā no longer carry out their traditional duties, because they are too few in number and their traditional duties do not yield any substantial rewards. Most of them began to call themselves Kapāli, the honorific names for the Jogī caste. Their traditional duties are to perform barber's work for the Jogī caste; i.e. to shave hair and cut toenails. They also have to hand over mourning dresses to Jogī on the day of purification (*byamkegu*), and accept a portion of food offered to the deceased (*jogibvah*) from the Jogī. Till the 1980s, they had their own priests whom they used to invite from Kathmandu.

### **The Dyolā or Po (cleaners, guardians of temples)**

The Dyolā or Po, are the guardians of the shrines of the mother goddesses (*piṭha*) and are also cleaners. They are the only untouchable Newar caste in Sankhu. The population is 62 comprising eleven households in Sankhu. Their houses are concentrated at the outer rim of the town in the northeastern extremity of Sālkhā quarter. Besides guarding mother goddesses and cleaning, their traditional occupations are fishing, weaving bamboo baskets, collecting discarded material belonging to the dead at the cremation ground and begging. They also traditionally rear pigs and ducks. They pick up dead animals like goat, sheep, buffalo and chicken from the street and eat them. Among their traditional duties is to collect food from the higher caste people when they organise feasts. They also collect food (*pinḍa*) discarded on the riverbanks around Sankhu after the performance of a ritual food offering for deceased (*śrāddha*). Today only a few Dyolā continue these tasks and they are rarely seen begging from door to door on every Ekādaśī, Carhe, Punhi and during eclipses like they



used to do in the past. People believe them to represent Rāhu, a demon who seizes the sun and moon, and who is believed to be the cause of eclipses. So people give them salt, clothes, grains and money believing this helps to free sun and moon from Rāhu's captivity.

In my interview with Sanu Dyolā (89), the oldest Dyolā in Sankhu, he said that collecting leftover foods, *piṇḍa* and begging are not done for religious merit but for food. They are abandoning these duties because they found it stigmatising and they do not live in such poor circumstances as they did in the past. Most young Dyolā from Sankhu found employment as cleaners in Kathmandu or at army barracks or elsewhere, so only the children, the old, and the disabled Dyolā are living in Sankhu now. Sanu said guarding mother goddesses or cleaning are not that bad tasks, but collecting leftover food is really a dirty job.



Plate 16 Houses of the Dyolā in Sankhu in the mid-1950s (Photo courtesy: Colin Rosser).

Dyolā in Sankhu are not supposed to go beyond the Mandala Bhairava shrine in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary and they are forbidden to touch Mādhav Nārāyaṇa or to enter other temples in Sankhu. Generally, they are also not allowed to enter other people's houses. Dyolā in Sankhu still obey all these restrictions, and do not dare to enter the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. However, their relatives visit Sankhu and they do not follow such restrictions. Sanu found it very disgusting when somebody calls him untouchable or Po or Poḍe. He prefers to be called by his caste Dyolā. For their domestic rituals they invite Dyolā Gubhāju from Lagan quarter of

Kathmandu who is also a Dyolā. For their girl children *ihī* and *bārḥātayegu* rituals are not performed, but *kaytā pūjā*, an initiation is performed for young boys. In every Dyolā house there is an *āgaṃ dyo* and a *digu dyo* but there are no restrictions for married daughters or sisters on seeing them, such as the case is with most high-caste Newars.

They consider themselves Hindus and do not consume cow's meat. However, when I interviewed Thike Dyolā, one of the Dyolā priests in Kathmandu, he said that the Dyolā in Tistung, Citlāng and Pālūng consume dead cow's meat.<sup>23</sup> As all other Newars, they observe all feasts and festivals including the festival of Vajrayoginī. Svantī is observed for five days like all other Newars do. During the Vajrayoginī festival, they used to participate with their flutes and drums, but the present generation stopped learning to play the flute. In the past, Dyolā were forbidden to carry the palanquins of the gods during the Vajrayoginī festival, but the new generation no longer obeys this restriction. On the day of Sithinakhaḥ they worship their *digu dyo* on the banks of Śālinadī. On the day of Gathāmmugaḥ they throw food for ghosts and burn straw next to their quarter on the bank of Ajikhusi, but they do not make a Bhu dyo of their own. When someone dies, a boy of the deceased family, disguised as a cow, takes part in the procession of *sāyāḥ* that is carried out from the Sālkhā quarter. In the month of Yaṃlā, from Yaṃlāthva Ekādaśī to Yaṃlāgā Paṃcamī, they offer burning wicks to their Nāsaḥ dyo, Gaṇeśa and Bhairava, located in their quarter, but they never possessed a Yambā dyo as far as Sanu Dyolā remembers. During the Mohanī festival, they do not grow sprouts (*nalāsvām*), but they observe the feasts of Kuchibhvay, Syākotyāko and Daśamī. They also worship weapons in their *āgaṃ*, but do not use them. As Sanu said, there is no shrine of Durgā at their *āgaṃ*. The Dyolā in Sankhu do not observe the month-long offering of light to the sky (Katimata).

During major festivals, they must invite their relatives and feed them lavishly. It is customary to take their guests to a local *bhatti* to serve them drinks. Usually, they go to one of the *bhatti* run by Sāymi or Nāy. In all places they need to wash plates and bowls after they use them, but the owners treat them kindly.

At the time of the rice harvest, the Dyolā in Sankhu go to collect unhusked rice from high caste Newar's fields. Some of the Dyolā families in Sankhu have barter exchange relations with the Tāmāng living in Khoriyāgāon. They supply them with duck eggs for their rituals and cigarettes during rice transplantation and harvest. In return, they receive certain amount of unhusked rice yearly at the time of harvest.

In the past, the Dyolā were also the public executioners. Sanu Dyolā witnessed only one execution in his lifetime when he was about ten years old. This was the execution of a Tāmāng in Ghumārīchok, a few kilometers north of Sankhu, who had raped and murdered a Tāmāng woman. One senior Dyolā in Sankhu had to carry out the execution. Sanu remembered that all male Dyolā in Sankhu had to go around town shouting and jumping before they approached Ghumārīchok. They were allowed to plunder shops, which were kept open. Many people from Sankhu and the surrounding villages gathered to witness the event. The condemned was fed yogurt and curd before the execution. The senior Dyolā cut off his neck with a sword in one stroke.

Sārki, Damāi, Kāmī, Gāine, Cyāmakhala and Hālāhulu are lower castes for the Dyolā. The Dyolā do not accept drinking water or cooked food from them. According to Sanu Dyolā, children born of intermarriage between these castes and they are called Hālāhulu, because such children lose their caste identity. In Sankhu, however, there are no Hālāhulu or Cyāmakhala castes. In the past, a Cyāmakhala from Kathmandu used to come to Sankhu to collect *jogibvaḥ* from the Dyolā. Similarly, a Hālāhulu from Kathmandu used to come to collect discarded *piṇḍa* from them but they both stopped coming to Sankhu almost two decades ago. The Dyolā from Sankhu have marriage relations with the Dyolās from Nālā, Panauti, Patan, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Pālun, Tistung and Citlāng.

**Table 13 Castes rendering service during ritual and number of households receiving service, 1997**

Rituals and castes rendering service	Number of HH receiving service
<b>Macābubemke (Birth purification)</b>	
Jyāpu (farmers)	136
Nau (barbers)	472
Jogi or Kapāli	325
Nāy (butchers)	136
<b>Macājamko (Rice feeding ceremony)</b>	
Nau (barber)	42
Vajrācārya	38
Rājopādhyāy	62
Jośī	16
<b>Ihi (Ritual marriage of young girls)</b>	
Jośī	509
Nau (barbers)	472
Rājopādhyāy	472

<b>Bārḥāteye (girls' pre-puberty ritual)</b>	
Joṣī	502
Nau (barbers)	470
Jogi (Kapāli)	440
<b>Kaytāpūjā (loin cloth giving to boys)</b>	
Joṣī	472
Nau (barbers)	502
Rājopādhyāy	472
Jogi (Kapāli)	442
Danyā	17
Jyāpu (farmers)	200
Gathu or Mālī	97
Ihipā (Marriage)	
Joṣī	472
Nau (barbers)	449
Vajrācārya	202
Rājopādhyāy	439
Jogi (Kapāli)	505
Jyāpu (farmers)	115
Danyā	17
Nāy (butchers)	35
Gathu (Mālī)	91
<b>Jaṃko (old age ceremony)</b>	
Joṣī	402
Jyāpu (farmers)	87
Nau (barbers)	503
Vajrācārya	189
Rājopādhyāy	502
Jogi (Kapāli)	402
Gathu (Mālī)	35
<b>Sī bale (ritual related to death)</b>	
Nau (barbers)	502
Vajrācārya	25
Rājopādhyāy	501
Jogi (Kapāli)	502
Nāy (butchers)	119
Joṣī	301
Danyā	17
Kisāni	3
<b>Nahynhumā (seven day's food offering to death)</b>	
Nau (barbers)	422
Vajrācārya	65
Rājopādhyāy	401
Jogi (Kapāli)	438

Dyolā	37
Joṣī	112
Danyā	5
<b>Garuḍapūraṇ recitation</b>	
Rājopādhyāy	507
<b>Eghāraghāsā (eleven day's food offering to death)</b>	
Nau (barbers)	402
Vajrācārya	547
Rājopādhyāy	80
Jogi (Kapāli)	122
Joṣī	17
<b>Ghaḥsu (house purifying fire sacrifice)</b>	
Joṣī	82
Nau (barbers)	466
Vajrācārya	322
Rājopādhyāy	439
Jogi (Kapāli)	212
Danyā	12
Latyā (45 day's śrāddha)	
Joṣī	302
Nau (barbers)	452
Vajrācārya	226
Rājopādhyāy	432
Jogi (Kapāli)	216
Danyā	12
<b>Khulā (sixth month's śrāddha)</b>	
Joṣī	277
Nau (barbers)	457
Vajrācārya	224
Rājopādhyāy	433
Jogi (Kapāli)	226
Danyā	12
Nāy (butchers)	8
<b>Dakilā (first year's śrāddha)</b>	
Joṣī	288
Nau (barbers)	453
Vajrācārya	225
Rājopādhyāy	430
Jogi (Kapāli)	219
Danyā	12
<b>Nidaṃtithi (second year's śrāddha)</b>	
Joṣī	293
Nau (barbers)	451

Vajrācārya	220
Rājopādhyāy	431
Jogi (Kapāli)	210
Danyā	11
Nāy (butchers)	7
<b>Bārsik śrāddha (annual śrāddha)</b>	
Nau (barbers)	409
Vajrācārya	204
Rājopādhyāy	477
Jogi (Kapāli)	13
<b>Rudri (a special worship)</b>	
Rājopādhyāy	363
<b>Pūjā ājā (other worship)</b>	
Vajrācārya	501
Rājopādhyāy	33
<b>Kalaḥpūjā (worship with a basket)</b>	
Vajrācārya	449

In the past, Dyolā families did not send their children to school, but today they do. The first Dyolā girl passed the SLC (School Leaving Certificate) exam was in 1996. In the past, the Dyolā of Sankhu had no right to own any land, but today such restrictions do not exist anymore. For the first time, a Dyolā who returned to Sankhu after his retirement from the army barracks, bought three *ropanī* of land in the mid 1990s. He also built a three-storied house which is the first house owned by a Dyolā in Sankhu. Traditionally, they were allowed to build only single-floor or single-roofed houses.<sup>24</sup> In the past, Dyolā ladies were not allowed to wear golden ornaments, but such rules do not exist any longer. The Dyolā in Sankhu were relatively poor and more dominated by higher caste Newars than in other Newar settlements. In Nālā, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur, Patan, Citlāng, Pālun and Tistung, the Dyolā are well off and not oppressed as in Sankhu. In Nālā and Pālun, they are not considered to be untouchable but only impure. In both these places, they also serve as musicians, playing Dhime, Nāykhim and flutes during local festivals. In Nālā the Dyolā are wealthy and capable of providing loans to high-caste Newars.

### Caste-interrelations

One of the interesting aspects of Newar castes is their interdependent relationship. The data obtained from the survey show that various castes in Sankhu still perform their caste-bound duties during several ritual

ceremonies. Table 13 shows the number of households that received services from various castes during the performance of various rituals related to the life cycle and death. The receivers include the Rājopādhyāy, Vajrācārya, Śākya, Śreṣṭha, Jyāpu, Malla, Joṣī, Kumā, Puṃ, Chipā, Sāymi, Kau, Duim and Bhā families. Table 13 shows that Rājopādhyāy, Vajrācārya, Joṣī, Jyāpu, Gathu, Nau, Jogi, Nāy, Danyā and Dyolā are the only castes which provide the services during different ritual ceremonies, while it appeared that Śākya, Śreṣṭha, Malla, Kumā, Puṃ, Chipā, Sāymi, Kau, Duim, Bhā, Nāju and Doṃ do not provide any duties during any of the ceremonies mentioned in the table.

### **Religious affiliations: Hindu or Buddhist?**

As has been discussed in Chapter 3 it is hard to draw a line between Hindus and Buddhists in Newar society: generally and people employ Buddhist or Hindu priests depending on the occasion. However, it appeared from my survey that the trend to call oneself Hindu is now common and that except for the Buddhist priests (Vajrācārya), the Buddhist household monks (Śākya), two farmer households and the oil pressers (Sāymi), all other Newars of Sankhu prefer to be called Hindu. Only two farmer families said that they were Buddhist. Table 14 illustrates this fact. Out of 789 households in Sankhu only 68 households preferred to be called Buddhist. Among the Newars, calling oneself Hindu became more popular after the 1769 Gorkhā conquest of the Valley, as a result of the government's policy to patronise the Hindu religion, which also introduced the 1854 legal code based on Hindu religion. Among the Newars the demarcation between the Hindu and Buddhist religions is not so clear. I use the word "Claimed" in my table below, because it is inaccurate to call Newars either 'Hindu' or 'Buddhist.' When we look at the use of priests, we see Newars employing both Hindu and Buddhist priests according to their need of a particular ceremony.

The various practices of the Newars do not support the Newars calling themselves Hindu or Buddhist in the exclusive sense of the word. This will become clear from Table 14 below. On many occasions, most of the people who claim to be Hindu, use Buddhist priests for their domestic rituals. Out of the 442 Śreṣṭha families, only 111 claimed to employ only Brahmin priests; 314 families answered that they employ both Hindu and Buddhist priests depending on the occasion; while thirteen families replied that they never used Brahmin priests for any occasion. However, all the 442-Śreṣṭha families claimed to be Hindu. In Sankhu, according to Buddhist priests and many laymen, the tendency among the Śreṣṭhas

changing towards Buddhist priests to Hindu priests is a phenomenon not older than living memory.

Among the farmer caste, the claim to be Hindu is a recent phenomenon. Of 77 farmers in Sankhu, only one family claimed not to use a Buddhist priests for any occasion. Fourteen families said that they employed both Hindu and Buddhist priests and 59 families said that they only employed the Buddhist priests. The remaining three gave no clear answer. Among twenty Jošī families, i.e., those who assist Brahmin, only six families said they did not use Buddhist priests for any occasion while the remaining fourteen said do use priests of both denominations.

**Table 14 Claimed religions per caste per household (HH) 1997**

Caste	No. of HH	Percent of total HH	Claimed Hindu	Claimed Buddhist
Rājopādhyāy (Brahmin priests)	3	0,4	3	0
Vajrācārya (Buddhist priests)	37	4,7	0	37
Śākya (married monks)	4	0,5	0	4
Jošī (assistant priests)	18	2,3	18	0
Śreṣṭha (traders, administrators)	442	56,0	442	0
Malla Khacarā (mixed descents)	28	3,5	28	0
Jyāpu (farmers)	77	9,8	75	2
Prajāpati (potters)	11	1,4	11	0
Gathu (gardener)	6	0,8	6	0
Ranjitkār (dyers)	15	1,9	15	0
Citrakār (painter)	1	0,1	1	0
Nau (barbers)	10	1,3	10	0
Kāranjit (funeral priests)	5	0,6	5	0
Sāymi (oil pressers)	25	3,2	0	25
Kau (blacksmiths)	1	0,1	1	0
Duim (Trumpeters)	12	1,5	1	2
Nāju (horn blowers)	3	0,4	3	0
Nāy (butchers, musicians)	48	6,1	48	0
Jogi (Kapāli) (tailor, musicians)	19	2,4	19	0
Dom (dholak players)	12	1,5	12	0
Danyā (funeral priests for Jogi)	1	0,1	1	0
Dyolā (cleaners & guardians)	11	1,4	11	0
Total	789	100,0	721	68

Among the fifteen dyer (Chipā) families, only two families employ both kinds of priests, all other families employ only Buddhist priests, but all of



them claimed to be Hindu. Of five Kāranjit (Bhāḥ), families, two employ only Buddhist priests, while the three other families employ both kinds of priests; yet, all five families claimed to be Hindu. All the eleven potter or Prajāpati families claimed to be Hindu, while only three families appeared to use priests of both categories, while eight families used only Buddhist priests. All the 25 oil presser families claimed to be Buddhist, but four of them appeared to use both kinds of priests while the rest used only Buddhist priests. Of 28 Malla families, six families claimed to employ only Brahmin priests, while all other families said that they used both Buddhist and Hindu priests, though all of them claimed to be Hindu. All the ten barber families said they were Hindu, but nine families use only Buddhist priests and one family was not clear about using priests.

Only the four Śākya families, and 37 Vajrācārya families, appeared to be unambiguously Buddhist. Between two Brahmin families in Sankhu, one family appeared to use Buddhist priests on certain occasions.

Of eleven trumpeter (Duim) families in Sankhu, one did not give a clear answer to their religious status, while the others said they use only Buddhist priests, even if all of them also claimed to be practicing Hindus. All nineteen Jogī (tailor and musician), 48 Nāy (Butchers), eleven Dyolā (cleaners), twelve Dom and one Danyā families considered themselves to be Hindu. All impure castes employ people from their own caste as priests.

**Table 15 The use of priest per caste per households, 1997**

Castes	Only Brahmin	Only Vajrācārya	Both	Others	Total HH
Rājopādhyāy (Brahmin)	1	1	0	1	3
Vajrācārya (Buddhist priests)	0	37	0	0	37
Śākya (married monks)	0	4	0	0	4
Joṣī (assisting Brahmins)	6	0	12	0	18
Śreṣṭha (traders, administrators)	111	13	314	4	442
Malla Khacarā (mixed descents)	6	0	22	0	28
Jyāpu (farmers)	1	59	14	3	77
Prajāpati (potters)	0	8	3	0	11
Gathu (gardeners)	0	5	1	0	6
Ranjitkār (dyers)	0	13	2	0	15

Citrakār (painters)	0	0	1	0	1
Nau (barbers)	0	9	0	1	10
Kāranjit (funeral priests)	0	2	3	0	5
Sāymi (oil pressers)	0	21	4	0	25
Kau (blacksmiths)	0	1	0	0	1
Duiṃ (palanquin carriers, trumpeters)	0	11	0	1	12
Nāju (horn blowers))	2	0	0	1	3
Nāy (butchers and musicians)	0	2	2	44	48
Jogi (tailor and musicians)	0	0	0	19	19
Dom (dholak players)	0	4	0	8	12
Danyā (Jogi's funeral priests)	0	0	0	1	1
Dyolā (cleaners & guardians)	0	0	0	11	11
Not responded					2
Total	127	190	378	94	789

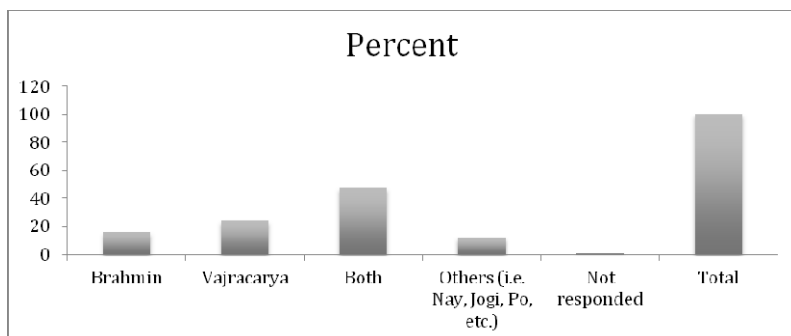
The cleaners invite their priests from Kathmandu, while the Jogis used to invite an old priest of their own caste from Banepā, a Newar town situated in the outer rim of Kathmandu Valley to the east. After the priest died his sons did not continue the priestly duties, so, now, the Jogis in Sankhu perform priestly tasks for each other. Employing one's son-in-law or brother-in-law, as priest is common among the Jogi and also among the cleaner's castes. Especially those who cannot afford to pay priests from far away, usually employ their own relatives as priests. For their domestic rituals, the Nāy caste employs Buddhist priests from Patan who are called Nāy Gubhāju, because they perform priestly duties for the Nāy caste. As we know from our discussion above, there is only one Nāy Gubhāju family in Konti, Patan who performs priestly duties for all the Nāy in Kathmandu Valley. The Nāy Gubhāju claim to be Gubhāju, or Vajrācārya Buddhist priests. Although they receive the ritual of Monastic initiation at a *caitya* in the courtyard of their house Gellner confirms that this is a

Taṇḍukār or Khusaḥ family having marriage relations with the Taṇḍukār in Patan.<sup>25</sup>

It is interesting to note that all the unclean and untouchable castes call their priest “Gubhāju,” the honorific word used for the Buddhist Vajrācārya priests in the Valley. It indicates that all the Newar low castes are or were associated with Buddhism rather than with Hinduism. During my interview with a Dyolā Gubhāju in Kathmandu, he told me that a Vajrācārya priest supplied his father the ritual text he uses for presiding food offering ceremonies to deceased (*śrāddha*). However, he said, all the Dyolā who are able to read the text and know the proper way of performing rituals, could be a ‘Gubhāju.’

Table 15 shows that most people in Sankhu use both Hindu and Buddhist priests while some of them exclusively use either Hindu or Buddhist priests. There can be no doubt that the Newar people’s claim of being Hindu is not fully accurate or incomplete from the viewpoint of employing priests.

Chart 7 Number of households according to use of priest



Most Vajrācārya families in Sankhu perform priestly duties at the Vajrayoginī temple as well as lifecycle and death rituals for their clients (*yajaman*). Usually the Vajrācārya families receive a weeklong turn to each family at the Vajrayoginī temple. In a week, depending on the timing of a year one’s ritual duties income vary from five hundred rupees to ten thousands.

As one Vajrācārya told me, if one’s turn falls during the big festival like Dasain, his income crosses ten thousand rupees, while if it falls during ordinary period, it can fall below five hundred rupees. The Vajrācārya priests’ clients are very high in number, so on average their income is higher in total compared to the Rājopādhyāy priests. However, as the

Vajrācārya must share their clients among their own cousins, their income per head comes far below the income of a single Rājopādhyāy in Sankhu. Because a single family of Rājopādhyāy receives a yearly visit in Sankhu and the priests do not need to share their clients with others.

Priests make extra income during the month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa (January and February). Depending on the number of participants their income is about fifty thousand rupees during this month. Similarly, while performing the *Ihi* ceremony organised for young girls in Sankhu, priests earn more than twenty thousand rupees every year (April). Therefore, the single Rājopādhyāy family's income is much higher compared to the Vajrācāryas in Sankhu.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed two major aspects of Newar society in Sankhu, namely castes and religious. We know from our discussion, that caste division has a long history in Nepal. However, after the Gorkhā conquest of Nepal, the caste hierarchy was reinforced by the implementation of the 1854 legal code based on Hinduism. Through several amendments, this legal code played a vital role in giving a new and modern rigidity to the Newar society. The 1964 legal code attempted to abolish caste distinctions, but this has been unrealistic so far. The hierarchies and barriers of caste are a prevailing factor among the Newars despite the crumbling down of many conservative notions of caste barriers. As we discussed, caste and its hierarchies are still significant. Among the clean castes, the higher and lower division is apparent, but this distinction is becoming less important than it used to be in the past. However, when it comes to matrimonial relations, people are very cautious and avoid any kind of inter-caste relations, especially when it comes to relations between obviously higher and lower castes.

Leaving aside the cases of elopement, no traditional marriages are possible across castes. In the matter of commensality, Sankhu experienced a great change during the past decades. In the past, Śreṣṭha and Jyāpu sitting together to eat, was problematic, but today such barriers between the castes have disappeared. However, the Śreṣṭha avoid sharing boiled rice with any of the lower castes. Such barriers are still more apparent, when it comes to sharing water and cooked food between certain lower castes and the higher castes. "Clean" castes avoid taking any cooked food or drinking water or sitting together with "unclean" castes whenever possible. One exception was registered in Sankhu when a young Nāy boy attended a wedding meal in a Śreṣṭha's house sitting together with other

higher castes. It was a significant signal of breaking the traditional boundaries between two entirely different castes in this relatively conservative small Newar town. However, it will be wrong to conclude that the borderline between “clean” and “unclean” castes will easily disappear in the near future.

In Kathmandu, caste-based organisations have emerged among the Newars, which some members of the Newar elite saw as a threat to Newar ethnic unity, while others dismiss it as non-significant.<sup>26</sup> The caste division in Newar society, though it lost some traditional values, will remain prevalent for many years to come.

In the matter of religion, despite the mixed Hindu-Buddhist culture of the Newar, the tendency of claiming to be Hindu is a growing phenomenon. However, my discussion provides ample data, that it is difficult to define them either as Hindus or as Buddhists exclusively. The 1997 survey data regarding the employment of priests is one criterion I applied to distinguish Hindus and Buddhists in Sankhu. As has become clear from the data, the claim of being Hindu or Buddhist is not consistent with Newar practice. This is also true when we look at the inclusion by all the Newars of all the gods and goddesses belonging to both religions in their pantheon. Feasts and festivals are not differentiated according to Hindu and Buddhist criteria. This will become even clearer from our further discussion of feasts and festivals celebrated in Sankhu in Chapter 10. The people honour all the deities belonging to both Hindu and Buddhist pantheons. Recently, a group of Newars involved in the ethnic movement, lunched slogans to reject festivals like Mohanī or Dasain, but such slogans failed to receive any response from the Newar community. It is because all the Newars have been following most of these feasts and festivals for centuries without distinguishing them either as Hindu or Buddhist. In conclusion, it can be firmly said that to define the Newar way of life as either exclusively Hindu or Buddhist is inappropriate.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER SEVEN

### NICKNAMES

Nicknames (*benām*) or Clan names (*kulanāma* > *kunām*) of the Śreṣṭhas found in Sankhu.

Nicknames	Meaning
Aiyā	an expression for pain
Ālubājyā	the potato grandfather
Āludvāre	the potato village chief
Avācā	the brick maker?
Baḥsi	a peach
Bajhām	a mixture of tobacco molasses used in hubble-bubble
Balaṃpu	related to place Balaṃpu
Baruvā	a sheep with large, long tail
Bhaku	the genitals of old men and women
Bhājam	a clay vessel used for roasting grains
Bhālu	bear
Bhātkhāi	rice eater
Bhuḷimpu	fly seed
Bhutām	one from Bhutan
Bursing	?
Casmāvāl	one who is with spectacles
Chyāmbā	?
Chyākahmākaḥ	pock-faced monkey
Dalli	dwarf
Dara	
Dhanacānasim	?
Dhasi	One who lives next to a water channel
Dhaubaji	a mixture of curd and beaten rice
Dhābā	?
Dhāgyā	?
Dheke	a rag
Dhvaṃ	tiger
Dvāre	a village chief
Doṃ	bull
Ghavā	milller
Ghorī	one whose body is scabby

Ghuru ghuru	one who snores
Ghīmtāṃmuni	of drum
Ghvārā	
Ghyo	purified butter (ghee)
Giri	one who is from Giri caste
Gvārā	ball-shaped
Hādi	earthen cooking pot
Hāleyo	one who shouts
Hāmthām?	
Hāmām	together with the root
Hāymlā	duck's meat
Huci	a wild bird
Hukhāsiṃ	hubble bubble
Hukhyāḥ	a benevolent ghost
Hvāpā	?
Jathāsāhu	
Jhaṃga	a bird
Jhyābā	
Jyāsāḥ	?
Kaḥmi	the carpenter
Kakumadu	a person without neck
Kālsim	a black lion?
Kāmi	blacksmith
Kamicākhum	the thief of myna bird
Kavaṃ	the skeleton
Kārki	one who is from the Kārki caste of the Parbate
Kaympvāḥ	the eye of a needle
Khānivā	?
Khipvāḥ	a dirty anus
Khiculu	a person who passes stools; one who is a coward
Khinavasāhu	wealthy man smelling of stools
Khopay	one who is from Khopa (Bhaktapur)
Khyāḥ	a benevolent ghost
Khupā	one who has six fingers
Khupāchīm	a sign of six
Khotti	one who is very greedy
Khukhunasim	?
Kipārām	?
Kisi	elephant
Kolāṃnasim	?
Koparākhi	one who sits on his bed pan
Kopuṃ	burnt
Kva	crow
Kumāi	one who is from the Kumāi caste of the Parbate
Kotaṃcā	one who is from the place called Kotaṃcā
Lākhe	monster

Lāmkomi	one who lives beneath the road
Lvahakapā	stone-head
Magar	One who is from Magar ethnic group
Māham	soldier
Mākaḥ	monkey
Mākhāsuli	hen pecked
Mājhi	fisherman
Malli	?
Maltā	pepper
Māhāmkāthe	god of death
Manāchem bhut	the ghost from the house of yeast
Manāpu	a cake of yeast
Māykem	black lentil
Mikhātagva	one with big-eyes
Nasim	one who eats as lot
Nauramginine	coloured
Nhāymaru	one who is without a nose
Nhisutu	one who is always in the habit of keeping nasal muscus
Nyācā	a fish
Nyākapā	A fish head
Nyāsi	frivolous
Nyāuri	?
Pārkhutte	
Phomsī	prunus puddum
Pāmgrā	wheel
Panyāju	?
Pāim	?
Pākaḥ	a dumb
Paṇḍit	a learned man
Phasampu	one who is blown up by the wind
Pikhā	from forty houses
Pothā	a person with abcess
Pyāthaḥ	rubbery meat
Phākam	edible stalk and leaf of Arum Colocasia
Pukhusi	one who lives on the side of a pond
Pumga	?
Sigvāy	one with brown moustache
Sakitvāy	the ritual friend of coco-yam
Sāhucā	a wealthy man
Sārki	a shoe-maker
Sārkibāu cha	shoe-maker gentleman
Simnasim	?
Sindhu	one from Sindhuli
Sukhi	a kind of grass used to make ropes or knitting mats
Svāthrā	?
Syāpu	pain seed



Syārbā	one who is from the Sherpā ethnic group
Takhāsi	door above the stair case
Tājāchemone	whose house is on the elevated place
Tāmāṃg	one who is from the Tāmāṃg ethnic group
Tāukyā	?
Thakāli	the leader
Thāru	one who is from the Thāru ethnic group
Tusinhāy	one with cucumber nose
Yāiṃcā	ant
Yāka mākaḥ	lonely monkey
Yākamisā	Loney woman

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### *SĪ GUTHI*, THE FUNERAL ASSOCIATIONS IN SANKHU

#### Introduction

The *sī guthi*, or the funeral associations, which are caste-bound and essential for every Newar family, present another important aspect of Newar society. *Sī guthi* are important not only as caste-bound associations, but also because of the crucial roles they perform in handling death in their members' families. In this Chapter, apart from giving the general features of *sī guthi*, I will also supply a detailed account of one of the secret Śreṣṭha *sī guthi* feast. Access to this feast was only possible because my family is a member of the *sī guthi* in question.

#### *Sī guthi* in Sankhu

*Sī guthi* is the most important *guthi* in Newar society as it determines a person's social identity. In the Newar language *sī* means death and *guthi* means an association or a trust. Therefore, the association related to death is called *sī guthi*. These associations, which may have other functions as well, are typical for Newar society. The *sī guthis* are caste-bound associations. Their main function is to carry out funeral processions and duties related to cremation. *Sī guthi* and *sanā guthi* differ among communities. In Sankhu, most Śreṣṭha used to call their funeral association *sanā guthi*, because its major function was only to join the funeral procession (*sanā*) while the Kisan performed the cremation. Only those associations, whose duty included cremation, were called *sī guthi*. However, since the cremator caste (Kisāni) in Sankhu has abandoned their work, all the *sanā guthi* have begun to cremate their dead bodies themselves. Therefore, there is no distinction left between *sī guthi* and *sanā guthi* in Sankhu and people now apply both the words to their funeral associations indistinguishably.<sup>1</sup>

Apart from a few cases, every family in Sankhu is member of a funeral association. There are 48 funeral associations in Sankhu. If a family is not a member of a *sī Guthi*, that family might face problems in carrying out the funeral procession for its members. Once a household splits up, each separate family must become a member of a *sī Guthi*. Even if a single son lives apart from his parents, he is excluded from his father's *sī Guthi*, which means he has to find his own membership in a *sī Guthi*. He may choose another *sī Guthi* or may become a member of his father's *sī Guthi*. Once sons or brothers start their own separate kitchen, they are considered separate families and are supposed to become members of a *sī Guthi* of their own. Where there are many *Guthi* of the same caste, one may choose to be a member of any one of them. Women (widows) are allowed to become member of *sī Guthi*, if no male members are left in a particular family, but they are not allowed to participate in any funeral duties performed by the *sī Guthi*. A *sī Guthi* can have an unlimited number of members, but most people prefer a *sī Guthi*, which does not exceed some 30 members. They think a large *sī Guthi* may turn chaotic. The largest *sī Guthi* in Sankhu is that of the Sāyṁī (Oil Pressers) caste which has 29 members. The largest *sī Guthi* of Śreṣṭha in Sankhu has 27 members. The smallest *sī Guthi* in Sankhu consists of three Śreṣṭha members.

**Table 16 Numbers of *sī Guthi*, the funeral associations according to castes in Sankhu**

Castes	Number of <i>sī Guthi</i>
Vajrācārya (Buddhist priests)	2
Syasyaḥ (Śreṣṭha, Pradhān, Māskyā, Joṣī, Ācāju)	27
Malla Khacarā mixed descents	2
Jyāpu (Dangol, Siṁ, Maharjan) farmers	5
Prajāpati (potters)	1
Gathu (gardeners)	1
Chipā or Ranjītkār (dyers)	1
Bhāḥ or Kāranjīt (funeral priests)	1
Sāyṁī (oil pressers)	1
Duim (trumpet blowers)	2
Nāy (butchers)	3
Jogī (tailor and musicians)	1
Dyolā (cleaners and guardians of mātrkā piṭha)	1
Total	48

Those who do not have a *sī Guthi* in Sankhu are: three families of Kau (blacksmiths), ten families of Nau (barbers), three families of Nāju, twelve families of Dom, three families of Śākya, twelve families of Śreṣṭha, one family of Vajrācārya, one family of mixed descent of Śreṣṭha and Bhāḥ (Kāranjit), two families of Brahmin, one family of Bhāḥ and one Malla family.

The Sikāko *Guthi*, has features of *sī Guthi* but it is a religious volunteer's organization. The total number of families without *sī Guthi* in Sankhu is 49. Of the twelve Śreṣṭha families without a *sī Guthi*, five are descendents of one forefather, who could not become a member in other Śreṣṭha *sī Guthi* because they were not recognised as Śreṣṭha. Their forefather who migrated to Sankhu from a Newar village of east Nepal was not considered to be pure Śreṣṭha. Six other Śreṣṭha families did not yet join any *sī Guthi* after they separated from their joint families. One family, who returned to settle in Sankhu after having been elsewhere during several generations, has not yet rejoined a *sī Guthi* since they lost their membership with the departure of their forefather long ago. Twelve Dom families have no *sī Guthi* because they failed to form a new *sī Guthi* after their *sī Guthi* disintegrated twenty years ago. First they split into two parts, and later both *sī Guthi* disintegrated.

The Nau (barbers) once possessed a *sī Guthi*, but since then it disintegrated because of an internal quarrel. It never reunited again. Three castes never had their *sī Guthi* in Sankhu, Śākya (married monks, Buddhist priestly caste), Kau (blacksmith) and Nāju. The reason was that their number was too small. One family, whose father was Śreṣṭha and mother was Kāranjit, did not join any *sī Guthi* because their membership in any Śreṣṭha *sī Guthi* was barred. He preferred not to join the *sī Guthi* of the Kāranjit either. Another family whose father was Kāranjit and mother was Duim, could not obtain membership in either the *sī Guthi* of the father or that of the mother. So his family is not a member of any *sī Guthi*. Two Rājopādhyāy Brahmin families in Sankhu do not have a *sī Guthi*. Since they are from Patan, they are supposed to obtain their membership in Patan, but at present there is no *sī Guthi* of Brahmins in Patan. Their *sī Guthi* dissolved long ago because of internal clashes. Therefore, close relatives of the dead person from Patan carry out the funeral rites for the Rājopādhyāy (Toffin 1995b: 204).

The families who are not associated with any *sī Guthi* find alternative solutions for funeral processions and cremations. For instance, the Dom families arrange funeral processions and carry out cremation voluntarily helping each other. Similarly, individual families without *sī Guthi* also

receive assistance from their friends and neighbours in organising funeral processions and cremations.

**Table 17 Castes and Number of Families without *sī guthi***

Caste	Number of Families
Brahmin (Hindu priests)	2
Śākya (goldsmith)	3
Śreṣṭha	12
Śreṣṭha+Kāranjit mixed descent	1
Malla	1
Citrakār or Puṃ (painters) (their <i>sī guthi</i> is in Bhaktapur)	1
Kau (blacksmiths)	3
Doṃ ( <i>dholak</i> player)	12
Nau (barbers)	10
Kāranjit+Duṃ mixed descent	1
Nāju (horn blower)	3
Total	47

Following the tradition of the Newars, the Parvate neighborhood around Sankhu tried to copy *sī guthi* for them. However, they call their *guthi* '*murdā guthi*', the association for death. Kṣetris in Salambutār, Pālubarī, and Gāmsulī also formed into *guthi*. In Salambhutār the *guthi* established in 1984, but it was dissolved three years later. In Gāmsulī, the *guthi* was established in 1985, but it did not last long either: in 1987, its members dissolved their *guthi* because of clashes among its members. At present, only one *murdā guthi*, founded in 1985, in Pālubarī, belonging to the Kṣetrī caste, exists. Their *guthi* does not have any features of a Newar *sī guthi*, except for arranging funeral processions.

### **Funeral duties of a *sī guthi***

Whenever a death occurs in the family of the members of a *sī guthi*, the family informs the *pāhlā*, the member of the *guthi* who is on duty for that particular year. There is no chairman as such but the *pāhlā* acts as a coordinator. The *pāhlā* has to circulate the message to the other members. The *pāhlā* has to bring a shroud (*devaṃ*) during the funeral procession. In most cases, another member of the *guthi* helps him, usually this is the man who has recently completed his turn, which is called *vasilā pāhlāmha*. As soon as other members receive the information about the death, they must gather at the home where the death has occurred. When a sizeable number

of *sī guthi* members are gathered, they start arranging the funeral procession.

As we already stated above, in the past, Kisānī, a sub-caste of the farmers had to prepare the fire (*mīpvāh*) with which to light the dead body's pyre. They also used to make the bier or carrier (*kūtāh*) from bamboo and perform the cremation. The old generation of Kisānī passed away, and their sons are no longer performing these duties. Nowadays, the *guthi* members themselves have to make the bier and arrange the cremation.

When a man or a woman is about to die in a Newar household, the body is brought down to the ground floor before death and its back is laid flat on the ground. After death, a traditional healer (*vaidya*), who has taken care of the patient at the time of dying, may pour water in the mouth of the person to confirm death. As soon as he declares the person dead, the relatives of the dead person also put water in his or her mouth as a last homage. This is an important duty of the family members in Newar society, which is called *lah tvamkegu*, to give water to drink. Then the dead body is fully covered with a piece of clean cloth by family members. It is kept on the ground floor of the house until it is carried away to the cremation ground. Right before the dead body is carried out of the house, one of the members of the *sī guthi* has to put some vermilion on the forehead of the body. Then the person's horoscope<sup>2</sup> is attached to his forehead, to be burned together with the body. This task is called '*mvagekegu*.' Then the face is covered with cloth again. Married daughters or other relatives who wish to offer a cover for the body (*phāṃgā*) must do it at this moment. Then the body is tied with raw cotton thread (*kacikā*) and covered with the shroud (*devaṃ*) provided by the *guthi pāhlā*. Soon after the dead body is placed on the bier, the family pours flower garlands and red powder over the body in a gesture of farewell. All these rituals may take a couple of hours. If the sons of the departed perform *daśakriyā* ritual, the chief mourner has to perform *śrāddha*, a ritual food offering during the funeral procession. At first, the chief mourner offers barley and black sesame in a gesture of *śrāddha* right outside the house, he then repeats it at several crossroads. After the cremation, he carries some ashes to a nearby river, draws with it a figure of the departed and performs a *śrāddha* again. If there is no son, the deceased brother's sons or other male relative may take over the chief mourner's tasks because traditionally daughters are not permitted to do this. However, if there are no male relatives of the dead person willing to perform these tasks, then a daughter of the dead person may perform all the tasks of a chief mourner.

The corpse is cremated on the same day of death. Cremations are also carried out during the night. It is believed that no delay should be made for a cremation when a death occurs. Usually, four members of the *guthi* carry the bier with the dead body to the cremation ground (*smasāna*). In certain cases members of the bereaved family carry the bier to the cremation ground. It is believed auspicious for sons to carry dead bodies of parents to the cremation ground and to cremate the dead body themselves.<sup>3</sup> The chief mourner, being the eldest son in case of his father's death and the youngest son in case of his mother's death, has to take three unbaked bricks and dispose off these at the neighbourhood crossroads (*chvāsahh*). In case of the death of a child only one or two people carry the dead body in their hands without a bier, and no bricks are disposed of. As soon as the bier is carried away from the house, one of the in-married women, preferably the chief mourner's wife, carries a broom and an earthen pot (*bhegaḥ*) containing some money and two pieces of clothes belonging to the dead person to be disposed of at the crossroads (*chvāsah*). Other members of the *sī guthi* follow the funeral procession carrying wooden logs on their shoulders. Neighbours, friends and relatives who have undergone *kaytā pūjā* (an initiation performed for boys) may join the funeral procession; if necessary, they also carry wooden logs on their shoulders. They feel it a moral duty to join the funeral procession to the cremation ground (*sanā vanegu*) when somebody dies in their neighbourhood. The people who join the procession cannot wear a cap or shoes. In Sankhu, boys who have not yet taken *kaytā pūjā* initiation and women are not supposed to join the funeral procession to the cremation ground, with the exception of impure castes like the Nāy and Dyolā. In other Newar towns such as in Kathmandu, farmers (Jyāpu) and some other low castes like the Nāy and Dyolā traditionally allow women to their funeral processions but such a custom is rare among other Newar castes.

In front of the funeral procession, two butchers with the butcher's music (*nāykhim*), walk along playing the funeral music, some Duim follow them, blowing their trumpets at different crossroads and boundaries along the road to the cremation ground. A Kisāni with a fire carrier in his hand walks behind them, followed by a person with a basket full of mixed popped rice, unhusked rice, red powder and coins, which he scatters on the way to the cremation grounds. After them, a Nāy woman walks with a bunch of straw in her hands. As we stated earlier the Nāy, Duim and the Kisāni, one after another, have abandoned their duties in Sankhu during the last twelve years.

Behind the Nāy woman, the bier carriers follow. Just behind them again the chief mourner walks, crying. Along with him, two members of

the *sī guthi* walk holding his arms on their shoulders. Other male members of the bereaved family and relatives walk behind them. Sons and relatives, covered with a shawl (*gā*) on their head, cry while they walk to the cremation ground. Then, the *guthi* members and others follow the procession with some wooden logs on their shoulders.

As soon as the procession arrives at the cremation ground, some of the *guthi* members arrange the wooden logs in such a way that the dead body can be placed on top of the pile. One of the *guthi* members takes away the shroud soon after the dead body is placed on the wooden logs. The shroud is carried back to the *pāhlā*'s home to be stored for later use. When the shroud is too old to be used it is burnt together with a dead body. Those who attend the funeral procession put a little water into the mouth of the dead body to pay their last respect. The family members give water only after other people have done so. The chief mourner is the last one to offer water before he lights the funeral pyre.

The cremator *Kisānī* used to collect valuables like a piece of gold and money from the dead body, which the family members offer to the body, but nowadays a *Dyolā* collect these. All the cloths of the dead body are removed before the fire is lit and the *Dyolā* on duty collects them. The dead body is burned to ashes. One of the *sī guthi* members records the attendance of the members at the cremation ground while others remain busy tending the funeral pyre. Family members of the dead, relatives, neighbours and friends who join the funeral procession, return home as soon as the pyre is lit. In the past, in the case of high caste Newars, the *sī guthi* members could leave the cremation ground as soon as the fire was lit. They need to wash their faces and feet before entering homes. Until the chief mourner returns from the cremation ground, other members of the bereaved family who accompany the funeral procession are not allowed to enter home. The chief mourner's wife receives him at the entrance of the house by sprinkling some broken beaten rice (*cvakābaji*) over him and burning reddish brown mustard seeds (*paḥkā*) and yellow mustard seeds (*ikāh*) on a shallow earthen pot (*salim*) with burning charcoal. She also moves a knife around the chief mourner. This ritual is called *balimpiyegu* or to ward off evil spirits, which may have accompanied these individuals when they come back from the cremation ground (Manandhar 1986:171). The bereaved family cannot take any food until the *guthi* members return home after completing the cremation. Usually, the nearest relatives of the bereaved family come with foodstuffs to break their fast (*cipam thikeyu*).

From the next day onwards, the bereaved family may invite a Brahmin priest to recite *Garuḍapurāṇa*, a Hindu religious scripture containing stories of the cosmic world, where, people believe, the dead are penalised



or rewarded according to their behaviour during their lifetime. The first thirteen days after death can be considered the major mourning days. During these days, the chief mourner and his brothers stay apart from other family members, perform *śrāddha* every morning at the bank of a river, take a bath and eat only one meal a day cooked by themselves. Friends and relatives visit the family to present their condolences (*bicāḥ hāyekegu*) and bring them food to eat (*cipaṃ thikeyu*). They may bring foodstuffs like beaten rice, boiled peas, cooked potatoes, green vegetables, alcohol, sweets and fruits. Several foodstuffs such as meat, garlic, onion, tomato, soybean, etc. are forbidden to eat during this mourning period. For one year the sons and daughters do not drink milk in case of their mother's death and yogurt in case of their father's death. Sons wear white dress as a sign of mourning. The bereaved family may not celebrate any festivals and perform lifecycle rituals during that year.

### ***Sī guthi's duties after the cremation***

For a few more days after the death of a person, the *sī guthi* members have to fulfill duties towards the family in which the death occurred. Their next main duties are on the tenth day after the death, called *du byaṃkegu*, or ritual purification. On the previous day, the *pāhlā* informs other members to attend the event. On the day itself, at about eight o'clock in the morning, the *guthi* members accompany the mourners to the riverbank, where the chief mourner, accompanied by his brothers, performs a *śrāddha*. Then the chief mourner, his brothers and other male members of the family have their head shaved and their nail symbolically cut (*lusi thikeyu*) by a barber, after which all of them take a bath in the river. The family members prepare the mourning dresses, i.e., a white shirt and white trousers, to be handed over to the mourners on this occasion. The family priest hands over the mourning dresses to the chief mourner and his brothers but he does not touch the mourners. The barber receives the old dresses and *dakṣiṇā* of ten to twenty rupees from each of the mourners. On this occasion too, the attendance of *sī guthi* members is recorded. Absentees are charged fines. After the mourners have dressed, the team returns home. The *sī guthi* members have to accompany the mourners to their home; only then they may return to their own houses.

On the same evening the *guthi* members have to accompany the mourners to the riverside where the mourners offer food (*jāpe khāyegu*: lit. to hang cooked rice) for the deceased person. In Sankhu, this is done on the banks of the river Śālinadī in a bush. People believe that as soon as the dead person's spirit eats the food he gives up hunting home.

On the eleventh day, a ritual food offering (*śrāddha*) is performed at the riverbank then performed a fire sacrifice to purify the house (*ghaḥsu*). Those *guthi* members, who carried the bier on the day of the funeral procession, are invited to shake their hands over the fire on this occasion and are invited to eat food in the evening. Some families may perform *latyā śrāddha* on the twelfth day, which is followed by another *śrāddha* on the next day, while others may perform the *latyā śrāddha* only on the 45th day after the death. On this occasion, the bereaved family assisted by a Brahmin priest perform a *śrāddha* and give away their priest those objects which they suppose the deceased person would use; such as bed, mattress, blanket, mosquito-net, mat, cloths, shoes, umbrella, foodstuffs, utensils.



Plate 17 Items made ready to give in gift (*dāna*) to a family priest from the deceased family during the 45th day's offering (*latyā śrāddha*). They include: bed, mattress, blanket, mosquito net, mat, cloths, utensils and foodstuffs. (Photo courtesy: Colin Rosser, mid-1950s).

On the thirteenth day, early in the morning, the *sī guthi* members have to go to the home of the mourners to accompany them to the priest's house. This ceremony is called *pitabvanegu*, or to take the mourners out. When the team arrives at the priest's house, the priest consoles the mourners, and asks them to continue their normal duties of life. Depending on the priest, the session can be shorter or longer, but always less than an hour. Then, the *guthi* members and the mourners return to their homes. This is the last

occasion for the *guthi* members to attend to funeral duties after somebody belonging to their members' families has died. Depending on a family, the *guthi* members may be invited for the 45th day's *śrāddha* feast, but this is voluntary in most *guthi*.

All those *sī guthi* members who fail to attend to any of the above mentioned funeral duties are penalised (*baṃ puikegu*) according to *guthi* rules. Every *sī guthi* has rules, but they may be different according to their convenience. In our own *sī guthi*, when one fails to attend a funeral procession during daytime one is fined 100 rupees and during the night the charge is doubled. One, who fails to attend a *du byamkegu* ritual, is fined 50 rupees and those who fail to attend a *pitabvanegu* ritual pay ten rupees fine.

### **Bhairava, the patron god of the *sī guthi***

Bhairava, the god of death, who is also considered to be the violent or destructive form of Śiva, is regarded as the patron god by almost all the *sī guthi* in Sankhu. Exceptionally, the Jogi people have god Gorakhanātha as their patron, but during the day of their *sī guthi* feast, they worship Bhairava and sacrifice a pig to Bhairava. One Śreṣṭha group calls their *sī guthi* "Bhimsen *guthi*" and worship Bhimsen.<sup>4</sup> They, however, consider only Bhairava as the patron god of their *guthi*. Another Śreṣṭhas' *sī guthi* is called Bhagavatī *guthi*, because the Bhairava, which they worship, is at the temple of Bhagavatī. The god Bhairava is present at every shrine of mother goddesses (*mātrkā*) as the male consort of the *mātrkā*s. The Dyolā, the untouchable, lowest Newar caste in Sankhu, worship Nāsaḥdyo, the god of music, and Gaṇeśa, but during their *sī guthi* feasts they do this in addition of worshipping Bhairava. On the whole, *sī guthi* of all castes in Sankhu worship Bhairava as their main patron god without exception.

Shrouds used to cover dead bodies during funeral processions are kept in trunks or in earthen jars, and are considered to represent the god Bhairava. At the end of a *sī guthi* feast, usually at the *pāhlā*'s house, these jars are generally handed over to the person who takes the turn (*pāḥi*) for the next year. Each day, the family members of the *pāhlā* worship the trunks or jars that contain the shrouds. Some people believe that before anybody dies in the family of the *sī guthi* members, the god Bhairava sends a message through these shrouds. Often the members of the *pāhlā* where the shrouds are kept tell stories of strange sounds or movements in the place where the jars stand. A *sī guthi* may possess several shrouds in its store. When shroud becomes old, the *guthi* members may decide to burn it together with a dead body.

### Annual sī guthi feast

Sī guthi feasts are the most important and most secret feasts among the Newars. Although it is of the nature of a sī guthi feast to be secret, the varieties of food served during a sī guthi feast are not very different from the food the Newars consume during other festive occasions. However, the quantity of food served during the sī guthi feast can be incredibly large, depending upon the funds of the sī guthi. The members eat only part of the food while the rest the members carry to their homes to be shared with their family members. The main responsibility for organising feasts goes to the pāhlā, the responsible person during a particular year. Usually, the feast is celebrated in the pāhlā's home. Only the male members of a household participate in sī guthi feasts; ladies are not allowed to participate. A family without male members can become a member of a sī guthi by paying their contribution to the feasts and receive their share as other members do. Women cannot eat during a sī guthi feast together with other members of the sī guthi. They cannot attend any funeral duties in public either. If there is a male member in a family who cannot attend funeral duties, he is compelled to pay a fine according to the rule of a particular guthi. This can range between 25 to 200 rupees, depending upon the rules of the guthi.

At present, there are seventeen members in my family's sī guthi. Once a year, twelve mānā of polished rice is levied by the pāhlā in kind from its members to make rice beer, while other expenses of the feast are shared equally. The sī guthi has about 30 thousand rupees deposited in a Bank. Although this guthi does not function as a financial organisation, it provides loans to its needy members. It charges an interest of 30 percent. Most sī guthis meet prior to their feast. This meeting is called 'ki munegu', the gathering of the members. Such meetings take place at least eight to sixteen days before the sī guthi feast. On that day, the main discussion will be about the expenses for the coming feast. Decisions about changes of regulations and the introduction of new rules are also taken during these meetings.

In Sankhu, most sī guthis observe feasts twice a year: once in winter, and once in spring. In spring, most sī guthis in Sankhu observe a feast either on the Day of Pāhāncarhe, the 14th day of the dark half of the lunar month Cillā (March) or on the full-moon day of Caitra (March/April), when the processional statues of Vajrayoginī are carried down to town from her forest temple. None of the sī guthi in Sankhu considers the winter feast a major one, but feasts in spring are considered important. Sacrifices of animals are not required during the winter feasts, but the spring feasts

cannot do without animal sacrifices to the god Bhairava. During winter feasts, it is sufficient to sacrifice an egg to Gaṇeśa at the *pāhlā*'s quarter.

During the spring feast, most *sī guthi* in Sankhu sacrifice a goat at the shrine of Mandala Bhairava, situated just below the temple of Vajrayoginī. Some *guthi* also take the sacrifice to other Bhairava shrines, such as at the temple of Bhagavatī, and to the Bhairava at the cremation grounds. In the past, most *sī guthi* feasted two to three days continuously. Today almost all *sī guthi* in Sankhu have reduced their feasts to one day. The main responsibility of cooking food goes to the person who was *pāhlā* (*vasilā pāhlāmha*) during the previous year. However, all other members must help during cooking. The schedule of *sī guthi* feasts is as follows:

*Kaulā*: On the day of the feast, the members gather in the home of the *pāhlā* early in the morning, long before dawn, to start preparations for the feast. At first, one of the ladies from the *pāhlā*'s family carries out worship to Gaṇeśa located in his own quarter. Then the members are served *kaulā* breakfast of a fried egg and drinks.

*Pūjā va bāhām syāyegu*, the sacrificial worship: All the *guthi* members must bring a plate with worship items to the *pāhlā*'s home early in the morning. The main *pūjā* plate is prepared at the *pāhlā*'s home itself. It serves to carry out a sacrificial worship at the Mandala shrine. It is obligatory during the spring feast, because then the *guthi* members visit the Vajrayoginī temple sanctuary to perform a sacrificial worship at the Mahākāla shrine. The *guthi* members, who go to worship Mahākāla Bhairava and Vajrayoginī, eat *samaybaji*, a festive food, at the temple sanctuary before returning home. It is a simple and light meal. They will eat more elaborate *samaybaji* later at the *pāhlā*'s home.

*Samaybaji*, special festive foods common among the Newars: Around noon, as soon as the worshipping team returns to the *pāhlā*'s home, the eldest member of the *guthi* distributes the flower and *ṭikā* from the goddess Vajrayoginī to all the *guthi* members. The *guthi* members make ready the *samaybaji*, the main festive food of the morning by that time. Several dishes are prepared from buffalo meat. People prepare boiled meat (*manā choylā*), burned meat (*hāku choylā*), raw minced meat (*cumlā*), big pieces of raw meat (*kacilā*), boiled blood (*hikvā*), fried meat (*pukālā*) and boiled and fried liver, heart, lungs and intestines (*bhutan*). Apart from meat dishes, several kinds of boiled beans (*bubah*), black and brown fried soybeans, fried fermented dried fishes, fried ginger, fried garlic (both green and dried), varieties of potato dishes, varieties of pickles (*acāra*), a

kind of popped rice (*syābaji*), cakes of ground black lentil (*vaḥ*) and pancakes made of rice flour (*catāmari*) are essential items for *samaybaji*. Raw pieces of pumpkin in different shapes (*khaypi caypi*) are one of the important items of the *samaybaji*, which is not eaten, but partly offered to god (*dyo chāyegu*) and partly they take to their homes.<sup>5</sup> Since the amount of food is much larger than one can eat, the *guthi* members carry the remaining portion of the *samaybaji* to their homes to be shared with their family members. Their family members take the *samaybaji* as the blessing (*prasād*) of the *guthi*.



Plate 18 The annual secret feast of a Śreṣṭha sī guthi (December 1997).

*Kvālā*: is a light snack (boiled heart, liver, lungs, intestines of buffalo and goat with green garlic) with drinks during the early evening. Usually early in the afternoon, *kvālā*, which can be considered the refreshment before the main feast served to the *guthi* members is eaten. For this purpose, liver, heart, lungs and intestines of both buffalo and goat are boiled. Cakes of ground black lentil (*vaḥ*) and green garlic and drinks are also served together with *kvālā*.

*Mūbhvay* or *sikāḥbhvay*, the main feast: The main feast is with boiled meat in the late evening and when the head of the sacrificed animal is shared among the members. This is the final meal of the sī *guthi* feast,

which usually takes place in the late evening. For the main course of the dinner, potato dishes, pickles, and beans are served. At the main meal, boiled meat with soup (*dāykalā*) of buffalo and the sacrificed animal are served as main ingredients, which is not included in *samaybaji*. In addition, varieties of green vegetables (*vāumcā*), boiled fenugreek seeds (*mikvāḥ*), bamboo soot (*chom*), sour soup (*pāuṃ kvāḥ*), pumpkin, tomato, radish (*laimkvāḥ*) dishes are also prepared. The raw pieces of pumpkin in different shapes (*khaypicaypi*) are again used to offer to god (*dyo chāyegu*). At first, all the *guthi* members must offer pieces from each food item to god. The food portion offered to god is put just in front of one's own portion of food. Until the eldest one eats, no others can begin eating. Again, for the main meal, beaten rice (*baji*) is used as one of the main items. Displaying food items on a round shaped leaf plate is interpreted as a *maṇḍala* surrounded by *aṣṭamāṭṛka* or the eight mother goddesses. Therefore such feasts are considered to invoke the power of the goddesses so that one receives their blessings. Out married sisters and daughters of the *pāhlā* must bring sweetmeats or pastry or eggs to serve the *guthi* members during the main meal, in return the *guthi* present them a meal after the conclusion of their feast. However, the daughters are not allowed to distribute the sweetmeats themselves, because they are not supposed to see the feast. This custom is known as *mari tanegu* or "adding of the sweets."

The main feast may last for two hours or more, because eating and drinking goes together with chatting. Sometimes quarrels may erupt because of arguments. Towards the end of the feast yogurt is served together with beaten rice (*dhaubaji*), which is followed by fruit (*sisāphusā*) to indicate the end of the feast. When an animal is sacrificed, the distribution of the head parts (*sī*) of the sacrificed animal to the elder members of the *guthi* takes place before the end of the feast. It is believed that the word *sī* is derived from the Sanskrit word *śira*, the head. Hence, the feast of the distribution of the parts of the head of a sacrificed animal among the *guthiyār* is known as *sikāḥbhvay*. Usually if a goat or sheep is sacrificed its head is divided into eight parts and distributed according to age seniority. 1) the right eye to the eldest in age (*nāyo*), 2) the left eye to the second eldest (*noku*), 3) the right ear to the third (*svaku*), 4) the left ear to the fourth (*pyaku*), 5) the nose to the fifth (*nyāku*), 6) the right jaw to the sixth (*khuku*) and 7) the left jaw to the seventh (*nhayku*).<sup>6</sup> In most cases, if a cock or duck is sacrificed, its head is used as *sī* and given to the eldest member. In case of a family feast *sī* is distributed among the eldest male members of a family, but if a family is small, female members are also given *sī*. In a *sī guthi* or other *guthi* feast, the tongue is not distributed

among the elder members but handed over to the new *pāhlā*. It is to oblige him to handle his turn successfully during the next year.

*Pābvaḥ lalhāyegu*, the handing over of the role of *pāhlā* to another member: Literally *pāḥ* means turn and *bvaḥ* means a portion of food. After the conclusion of *guthi* feast, the handing over (*lalhāyegu*) of *pābvaḥ* is the most important task. Turns rotate among the *guthi* members, but if a new member is admitted, he may take the turn within a couple of years. Generally, the *pāhlā* who organises the year's feast hands over the *pābvaḥ* to the new *pāhlā*. To serve double portions of food to both the *pāhlā* and his successor during a *guthi* feast is also a common custom. As we stated above, the new *pāhlā* receives the tongue of the sacrificial animal. He also receives drinks and swears to fulfill his duties during the following year. He is also handed over the god Bhairava, the god of death. In most cases, however, no images of Bhairava are to be found. Generally, they call Bhairava to the earthen jars containing shrouds of different sizes used for the funeral.

## Conclusion

In this chapter, we discussed the importance of *sī Guthi* or funeral associations. *Sī Guthi* are the most important caste-bound associations for every household in Newar society. It will be appropriate to say that caste barriers in Newar society prevail because of *sī Guthi* too. A person who separates from his parental siblings must become a member of a *sī Guthi*. As stated above, in Sankhu, except for 48 families, all others (741) are members of one or another *sī Guthi*. People consider it obligatory to become members of a *sī Guthi* because they believe that only in this manner the last rites or the funeral procession and cremation of their family members and themselves will be carried out properly. However, it will be wrong to conclude that those who are not members of a *sī Guthi* will not receive the proper last rites for their family members or themselves. Friends, family members or neighbours take the necessary care for those who are not members of a *sī Guthi*. This, however, is not considered the proper way for a Newar to act. People find it repugnant if household does not join a *sī Guthi*.

Even in a metropolitan city like Kathmandu, all the castes of Newar society strictly adhere to the *sī Guthi* system. It was found during my study that some of the Śreṣṭha families who migrated from Sankhu, Nālā, Banepā and Bhaktapur to Kathmandu formed a new *sī Guthi* of their own. Even the Parvate community around Sankhu, whose cultural life is very



much apart from Newar society, has now begun to imitate Newar *sī Guthi* associations. In a way, this is a clear indication that the tradition of the Newar *sī Guthi* is significant, not because they are caste-bound associations but because of the social duties they perform. Hence, *sī Guthi* associations will remain important for years to come and may constitute a valuable part of civil society of Nepal in the future. In the following chapter we will discuss more on detailed discussion on the Newar civil society, the socio-religious associations (*Guthi*), which are responsible for carrying out different religious ritual activities in the town and which involve people from different castes.

## CHAPTER NINE

# ROLE OF *GUTHI*, THE SOCIO-RELIGIOUS ASSOCIATIONS IN SANKHU

### Introduction

In the last Chapter we discussed *sī guthi*, the funeral associations in Newar society. In this Chapter our discussion will be concentrated on socio-religious *guthi*. In Sankhu, during almost every lunar month one or another festival takes place. Besides the big summer festival of Vajrayoginī and the month-long winter festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, smaller but equally interesting rituals are carried out, such as the ones connected with the sowing of rice during the summer and the rainy seasons. Each caste or *guthi* has to play its own role in these activities. The Vajrayoginī festival, the biggest festival in Sankhu, and all major and minor festivals and ritual performances in town are taken care of by the socio-religious associations, the various *guthi*. In the recent past, many *guthi*, which were responsible for certain festivals, have disappeared. As members of various socio-religious associations (*guthi*) or as members of different castes many people are performing such ritual activities and play crucial roles on such occasions. In this Chapter, the aim is to provide the results of my research of the various socio-religious *guthi* as well as the roles played by various castes of those *guthi* in Sankhu.

As will become clear from our discussion there are quite a number of lineage deity *guthi* in Sankhu. Most *guthi* recorded here are related to a particular deity: a daily worship, occasional worship or the management of processions, fasts and feasts. Sikāko *guthi* can be considered one of the unique *guthi* in Sankhu because of its specific nature, arranging funeral processions in case of the death of a stranger, out-married daughters and their children.

It appears from the survey that, although Sankhu is a small Newar town, more than eighty socio-religious associations (*guthi*) are still functioning. They are performing numerous festivals, restoring various rest places, temples, wells and stone spouts in the town. Due to the

diminishing *guthi* revenues ritual activities in Sankhu are disappearing year after year. I have listed 41 socio-religious associations, which have disappeared as a result of the loss of income from their land. These socio-ritual *guthi* have certain endowments of land cultivated either by tenants or by one of its members as the sources of income. As we already discussed, the 1964 land reform programme of Nepal curtailed a great deal of the income of most of the *guthi*. It cut down not only the amount of rents the tenants need to pay to landowners but also it granted more power to them. Decline of income sources of the *guthi* compelled *guthi* reducing their ritual duties and in many instances forced to abandon the whole *guthi*. In many cases, descendants of *guthi* founders also carry out religious ritual activities of such *guthi* in a minimal scale even after the loss of income. Whether all these *guthi* will survive in the long run is matter of doubt, because until now, it appeared that as soon as their financial support stopped their continuation as a social entity disrupted.

About half of the *guthi*, which are still functioning, are in one or the other way related to Vajrayoginī, the main goddess of the town. She is the most important goddess of the town and greatly venerated by both Hindu and the Buddhist population of the country. Twenty-two of the *guthi* are directly related to the festival of Vajrayoginī, while the other twenty-one *guthi* have partial and occasional duties at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. More than a dozen *guthi* that, were related to Vajrayoginī have disappeared. The second largest group of *guthi* is related to the Yamyā festival, the month-long festival dedicated to the god Indra that follows the rainy season. Even of this group, many *guthi* have disappeared. In Sankhu, the Yamyā festival was never celebrated with pomp like in Kathmandu. There are more than half a dozen *guthi*, which perform *śrāddha* rituals. Other *guthi* are responsible for performing annual processions of Bhagavatī, Mahādev, Gaṇeśa, Bhimsen, Kṛṣṇa and Vasundharā. Many *guthi* have no real duties to perform, but worship certain gods or goddesses and celebrate with annual feasts. Other *guthi* perform music or light wicks at temples on certain periods of the year. Many other *guthi* maintain certain rest places (*phalcā*, Nep.: *pāṭī*) or a stone spout (*lvahaṃ hiti*) or a temple, although these *guthi* have disappeared.

To describe features of the *guthi*, I basically rely on the information I obtained from interviews with the people carrying on these *guthi* or from informants in Sankhu who knew about the present situation of certain *guthi*. When available, I have quoted sources from the Regmi Research Collection, Nepal National Archives and the Guthi Corporation records and compared them with present practices of certain *guthi* and provided additional information.<sup>1</sup> However, it was not possible for me to link these

archival sources exactly with the present practices of these *guthi*. I have quoted these sources only when I found that the name of certain *guthi* was identical. I have also quoted inscriptional data relating to *guthi*.

### Social features of the *guthi*

In most cases, a *guthi* appoints its eldest member as its chairman (*nāyo*) or leader (*thakāli*). There are also many *guthi* whose *nāyo* or *thakāli* is the one who himself or his forefather had endowed land or properties to that *guthi*. One of the *guthi* members (*guthiyār*) whose turn (*pāḥ*) it is to manage the *guthi* is called *pāḥlā*. In some cases, the *pāḥlā* also becomes the *nāyo*. The *pāḥlā* takes the responsibility of the management of *guthi* activities for a full year. At the end of the annual *guthi* feast his turn ends by handing over *pāḥ* to another *guthiyār*. The annual shift of responsibilities in *guthi* management is also part of a general pattern. The *guthi* run by contactors (*thekedār*) are different from general *guthi*, because the Guthi Corporation appoints the *thekedār* to run such *guthi*. Generally, such *guthi* do not have any *nāyo* or *thakāli*, but the *thekedār* as the chief actor of the *guthi* that takes responsibilities of carrying out of the *guthi* tasks. As an appointee of the Guthi Corporation he has to obey to its rules. If the Corporation judges his performance unsatisfactory, it may terminate his term. Similarly, the *thekedār* can also decide for himself to discontinue his duties and inform the Corporation of the fact.

Usually, a *guthi* holds its feast once a year, in some cases this may be twice a year. A day before the feast the *pāḥlā* informs the other members of the *guthi* of the feast. On the day when a *guthi* observes its yearly feast, the *guthi* members have to bring a ritual plate (*pūjā*) with flowers, rice grains and other items of worship. In the morning, they visit a certain temple or a shrine where they worship and sacrifice an animal. On their return home they prepare festive food called *samaybaji*, which consists of beaten rice, meat, soybeans, ginger, garlic, boiled beans, vegetables and alcohol. They eat this for their breakfast. In the evening, they celebrate their major feast. If they make an animal sacrifice, the head parts of the sacrificed animal are divided among the members present (*sikāḥbhvay*). With the conclusion of the *sikāḥbhvay*, the management tasks of that year's *pāḥlā* come to an end. After the feast, the next year's responsibilities (*pāḥ*) are handed over to another *guthi* member.

The *guthi* whose income is sufficient to buy a sacrificial animal also observe a *sikāḥbhvay*, the feast of the distribution of parts of the head of the sacrificial animal (*sī*). As we know from our earlier discussion during a *sikāḥbhvay*, the head of a sacrificed animal is divided into eight parts: 1)

right eye, 2) left eye, 3) right ear, 4) left ear, 5) nose or muzzle, 6) right jaw, 7) left jaw and 8) tongue to be distributed among the eldest members of the *guthi* according to seniority. In most cases the tongue is given to the new *pāhlā* with an extra portion of food to induce him to take the responsibilities of the *guthi* tasks during the following year.

### ***Guthi* related to the Festival of Vajrayoginī**

The largest number of *guthis* in Sankhu is related to the goddess Vajrayoginī, her festival and her sanctuary. In the following section I shall first discuss those *guthis*, which are directly related to the Vajrayoginī festival. Sometimes, I shall also provide general information in addition to clarify the nature of those *guthi*.

### ***Svām guthi* (The Flower Association)**

The main function of a Svām *guthi* is to worship on the full-moon day of Caitra, when the procession of statues of Vajrayoginī is brought to town from their forest temple. The worship takes place after the processional statues have been placed on their respective palanquins, about a hundred metres below the temple square of Vajrayoginī.

In the past, there were many Svām *guthi* in Sankhu, but most of them have disappeared. I was unable to obtain the precise number of them and the time of their disappearance, but within living memory many Svām *guthi* still used to worship the processional statues at the same place on that day. The reasons behind the disappearance of these *guthi* are either clash among members of the *guthi* or of an economical nature. Only two Svām *guthi* are functioning today. In the past, this used to be one *guthi* with eight members. About forty years ago, because of an internal quarrel among the *guthi* members, it split into two. From then onward, one began to be called Besaḥ Svām *guthi* and the other Thāru Svām *guthi*, according to the family nicknames of their leaders.<sup>2</sup> Nowadays, each of the two is run by families that own land as tenants. Other members have retreated from the *guthi* because of clash. As the owner of the Thāru Svām *guthi* told me, the split occurred when one of the *guthi* members, who is now running Besaḥ Svām *guthi*, claimed the turn and part of the share of the feast meal of a recently deceased member of the *guthi*, which was not acceptable to the other members. The head of Besaḥ Svām *guthi* claimed, that the *guthi* received a land endowment from his forefathers. The member who is now running the Thāru Svām *guthi* had to pay 28 *pāthi*<sup>3</sup> of unhusked rice per annum as *kut* and another, who is running the Besaḥ

Svām *guthi* had to pay 36 *pāthī* of unhusked rice annually to the *guthi*. After the argument took place, instead of paying *kut* to the original *guthi*, they both preferred to initiate a Svām *guthi* of their own.

In most cases, when an internal argument developed, the entire *guthi* disintegrated, but in this particular case it resulted in the emergence of a new one. As the owners of these *guthi* explained, they felt a moral responsibility to continue the *guthi* because it gives them religious merit. Since the *guthi* associated with Vajrayoginī, the most venerable but also most irascible goddess of the town, they also fear that the goddess might curse them if they do not continue their traditional duties. In this case, two people took the burden at looking into the *guthi* because both of them own land belonging to the *guthi*. Usually, when a *guthi* disappears, a religious member may individually continue at least a small worship of the deity to whom the *guthi* used to be dedicated, such is the case of the Musyāḥ *guthi* (see below).

### ***Vajrācārya's guthi*** **(Associations of the Buddhist Priests Vajrācārya)**

The Buddhist priests (Vajrācārya) carry out many ritual activities in Sankhu. They are associated with many *guthi*: Khucupā *guthi*, Jātrā *guthi*, Nepāhja *guthi*, and Gātilā Dhalam *guthi* (The Association of Gātilā Vrata).

#### ***Khucupā guthi***

One of the important Vajrācārya *guthi* is Khucupā *guthi* (the association of six branches) whose duty it is to perform priestly duties at the Vajrayoginī temple. The *guthi* received its name from *Khu cu*, the six branches of Vajrācārya in Sankhu. All the Vajrācārya in Sankhu assume that they have a common ancestor, whose descendants later split into six branches. However, one of these six branches disappeared long ago, and only five branches of Vajrācārya remain. In each branch there are several sub-branches. The name of the *guthi* continues to be *Khucupā*, because its members used to come from those six branches and still believe that only these branches in Sankhu are the true descendants of a common ancestor. At present, there are seven groups of Buddhist priests to be found in Sankhu, but two of them are excluded on many occasions, because they are believed to be the offspring of married-out daughters of the Sankhu Vajrācārya who settled in Sankhu at a later date than the others. The five elders (*nyāmha thakāli*) from the five branches are supposed representatives of Pañca Buddha, the five Buddhas,<sup>4</sup> whose presence is necessary in all

major Buddhist ritual activities. These five *thakāli* are selected from those five main branches of Vajrācārya only. All seven branches, however, take turns to guard the Vajrayoginī temple.

One of the major obligations of the Khucupā *guthi* is to perform an invitation ritual at the temple of Vajrayoginī and two important fire sacrifices during her festival. As the task is called the invitation (*bvanegu* Skt.: *nimantraṇa*) of gods, the association is called Nimantraṇa *guthi* as well. The oldest member of each of the five branches has to represent his branch in this *guthi* to perform ritual duties during the fire sacrifices. However, in practice, others can take his place. In 1996 and 1997, when I observed the fire sacrifices, only the eldest of the five branches (*mū nāyo*), appeared, while their sons represented the other four *nāyos*.<sup>5</sup>

Another task of this *guthi* is to collect holy water from Takkijhvālā, upstream of the river Śālinādī and to ritually cleaning the statues of Vajrayoginī during her festival. For this purpose, not all members of the Khucupā *guthi* are obliged to attend; every year three members of this *guthi* take turns to carry out the task.

Another main function of this *guthi* is to find children to represent the gods and goddesses Kumārī, Gaṇeśa, Bhairava and Jethi Kumārī. It also supplies a Kumārī on the occasion of feeding a living Kumārī on the night of Mahānavamī during the Vijayā Daśamī festival. Children are selected from members of the Khucupā *guthi*.

In Sankhu, the feeding of Kumārī is done by the Taleju *guthi*, which has to carry out many other ritual duties in Sankhu and which is run by the Pukhulāchī VDC.

### ***Jātrā guthi* (the Procession Association)**

Another important *guthi* of the Vajrācārya in Sankhu is the Jātrā *guthi*; the association of the Vajrayoginī procession. This *guthi* includes members from all seven branches of the Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu. The main task of this *guthi* is to cook and offer food (*bhog chāyegu*)<sup>6</sup> to the processional statues of Vajrayoginī, when these reside in the rest place (*dyo satah*) during the festival. The five elders (*nyāmha thakāli*) of the Khucupā have to cook the food and one of them has to offer the food. In the past, all male members of the Vajrācārya in Sankhu had to gather at the secret god house (*āgaṃchem*) of Vajrācārya to eat a meal of boiled rice prepared by the *nyāmha thakāli*. This tradition has been abandoned a long time ago as it became too costly to maintain. The *guthi* is also obliged to perform a fire sacrifice on the day the processional statues are returned to the temple.

A record dated 1941 AD provides an account of a Jātrā *guthi* belonging to Vajrayoginī. This document tells that it had eleven *ropanī* and five *ānā* of land with an annual income of eight *murī* unhusked rice. Besides the abovementioned functions of the *Guthi*, the record mention some of the feasts and worships of the goddess the *guthi* had to carry out during the festival.<sup>7</sup>

### ***Nepāhājā guthi* (the Nepali Cooked-rice Association)**

*Nepāhājā guthi* is the third association belonging to the Vajrācārya of Sankhu. This *guthi* too includes all seven branches of Vajrācārya. The annual activities of this *guthi* take place at the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, the processional statue of Vajrayoginī, on the day of Milā punhi, the full-moon day in January (Pohelā or Pauṣa). On this day, the statue of Vasundharā<sup>8</sup> from the Vajrācārya *āgaṃcheṃ* of Sankhu is carried up to the Vajrayoginī temple complex and placed in front of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. In the afternoon, a fire sacrifice is carried out for Vasundharā in front of the statue of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. The eldest Vajrācārya performs priestly tasks while the *pāḥlā* has to perform as a Yajamāna. The *pāḥlā* has to arrange the fire sacrifice and other worships to be performed at the temple on that day.

After the completion of the fire sacrifice those who attended eat festive food (*samaybaji*). Next day, the Vasundharā statue is brought back to her temple (*āgaṃcheṃ*) in town. She receives a ceremonial welcome at the entrance of her *āgaṃcheṃ*, after which she is placed on her seat and the *guthi* members attend a feast. According to Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna, there used to be only the procession of Vasundharā in the past but later the goddess Vajrayoginī herself ordered to take her in a procession. In the middle of the festival people take the goddess Vasundharā (mother-in-law of Vajrayoginī) in the procession to call Vajrayoginī back to the forest temple.

In the past, this *guthi* used to have an income of more than 30 *murī* of paddy. Today it has only an income of four *murī*. This is insufficient to meet its expenses, so the *guthi* members share its expenses.

### ***Gātilā Dhalam guthi* (the Association of the Gātilā fast)**

In September (Yaṃlāgā or Āśvina Kṛṣṇa Tṛtīyā), the Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu announce an annual fast (*vrata*) to Vasundharā. At the Vajrayoginī sanctuary there are three statues of Vasundharā; on this occasion one of the Vasundharā situated at the Guṃbāhāḥ shrine is invoked. Women from



Sankhu and other towns observe the fast of Vasundharā on this occasion. Those who observe the fast of Vasundharā will be bestowed with wealth, health and happiness. This *vrata* is known as Gātilā Dhalamdanegu in the Newar language.

During a daylong worship, a fire sacrifice is performed in the name of Vasundharā in a room next door to where the processional statues of Vajrayoginī are kept. Although everybody from Sankhu and beyond is allowed to participate in the *vrata*, Vajrācārya priests play a major role. As members of the *guthi*, they are responsible for organising the fast. Members of this *guthi* are only from Vajrācārya families, and the eldest Vajrācārya priest has to lead the worship and the fire sacrifice. According to a Vajrācārya informant, the *guthi* has some land, which is cultivated by a tenant. Every year he pays five *murī* of paddy as rent. This income is not sufficient for the yearly *vrata* of Vasundharā, so they raise funds from the participants. Each year, thirty to fifty women participate in the fast. A fee of money (*dakṣiṇā*) and food made by the participants are shared among the members of the *guthi*.

Vasundharā is invoked as the mother goddess of the earth in Nepal, who grants various edible grains to feed human beings. So she is considered as the caring mother of human beings. The yearly fast of Gātilā is to please the goddess so that she continues her generosity forever. Those who take part in the fast have to abstain from food until the fire sacrifice is completed. At the conclusion of the fast, the participants give fees (*dakṣiṇā*) and food to the priests (*sirā*) and receive blessing-marks on their forehead (Nep.: *ṭikā*), as well as flowers and holy threads as blessings from Vasundharā. Those who participate must distribute *ṭikā*, flowers and holy threads to their family members, relatives and neighbours. Next day, the priests go around Sankhu town distributing *ṭikā*, flowers and holy threads as blessings from the goddess Vasundharā to every family; they receive some money as fees or food in return.

At present, none of the above mentioned *guthi* of Vajrācārya have a sufficient source of income, so the expenditures have either to be shared by the *guthi* members or to be borne by the *pāhlā* himself. In the past, the Vajrācārya priests had hundreds of *ropani*<sup>9</sup> of land cultivated by tenants and they used to receive many *murī* of paddy, but after the land reform programme was implemented their source of income diminished drastically. Some of their land also came under the control of the Guthi Corporation, which provides them very little for expenditure. As one of the Thakālī told me, they are performing all their religious duties out of respect for the goddess Vajrayoginī. On certain occasions such as for the

fire sacrifice during the festival of Vajrayoginī, they collect donations from the Sankhu residents.

### ***Lasakusa guthi* (Association of the Ceremonial Welcome)**

This is a multi-caste *guthi*, which used to have four members; one is a Vajrācārya, a Buddhist priest, another is a Tulādhār, a merchant and two were Sākya. All four were from Kathmandu. At present, no Sākya is a member of the *guthi* as one died without leaving a successor and another left because of economic constraints. With the Vajrācārya as priest and the Tulādhār as patron, the *guthi* still exists till today.

As the main function of the *guthi* is to carry out the ceremonial welcome of the processional statues of Vajrayoginī on their way back to the temple, it adopted the name of Lasakusa.<sup>10</sup> The activities of the *guthi* begin on the day of the arrival of the processional statues in town by offering wicks on traditional metal lighting stands (*tvādevā*). For this purpose, the members of the *guthi* come from Kathmandu to Sankhu on that day, and stay in Sankhu for the festival period. As it became inconvenient for the members to live in Sankhu for so many days, this tradition has been discontinued recently by delegating the task to a local Citrakār family of Sankhu. On behalf of the *guthi*, the Citrakār family takes care of the offering of wicks every evening at the *dyo sataḥ*, where the processional statues remain during the festival.

For the preparation of the ceremonial welcome, the *guthi* members arrive at the temple site two days in advance. They come with their families and relatives for the occasion and spend several nights at the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple (Gumbāhāḥ shrine), where they have to carry out secret worship prior to the official welcoming ceremony. In the evening of the sixth day (*ṣaṣthī*) of the festival, they go to the temple, but they do not perform ritual duties immediately on their arrival. They consider the first night a night of rest. The next morning, on Saptamī, they perform a simple worship to the deities at the temple, and are allowed to consume a meal of boiled rice in the morning. However, in the evening, they have to abstain from eating boiled rice, as this is considered unclean.<sup>11</sup> Instead of boiled rice, they eat beaten rice, boiled meat, fried soybeans, ginger, garlic, boiled beans and vegetables. The combination of these festive foods is called *choyalā bhu*.<sup>12</sup> This is to avoid eating boiled rice, so that they can remain clean after they have taken a bath and have cut their toenails for the ritual obligations to be fulfilled by them on the following day. Usually, on the day preceding any festival or any other

major feast, they have to take a bath and cut their toe nails, to make them clean for the next day.

At about eight in the morning on Aṣṭamī, the eighth day of the dark half of the month of Caulā, in a separate room adjoining the main room of the processional statues at the Gumbāhāḥ shrine they begin an elaborate worship. As it is a secret worship, no one but those who have obtained ritual initiation are allowed to attend. At the same time, they also worship in the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī. Another worship is carried out at the Mahākāla shrine with the sacrifice of sheep. The head of the sacrificed sheep is divided into eight parts and distributed among the members of the *guthi* as in other cases (see above). As there are only two members in this *guthi*, other parts of the head are distributed among their family members on the basis of seniority. Turn (*pāḥ*) of arranging *guthi* activities changes after the feast with the distribution of parts of sacrificed animal (*sīkāḥbhvay*) in the evening. Part of the meat mixed with *samaybaji* is distributed among the general public who have arrived with the procession of Vajrayoginī the next day. They consume the rest of the meat themselves. Since they have stopped sacrificing a buffalo, they buy the necessary buffalo meat from the market for their feast, as well as for the distribution of *samaybaji* the next day.

In the past, the procession of Vajrayoginī used to arrive at the temple site during the same night of their feast, but this is not the case anymore. Nowadays the procession arrives the next day, and the Lasakusa *guthi* members perform the ceremonial welcome to the deities on that same day. As soon as the processional statues are returned to their respective seats in the temple, the members of Lasakusa *guthi* perform another secret worship. This again is a long and elaborate worship of all the deities in the temple. After this worship their *guthi* tasks virtually end for that year. The next morning they leave for home after an ordinary worship and their usual morning meal at the temple.

One of the members of the *guthi* explained to me that the expenditures are increasing every year because of inflation, while their income has decreased in relation to the expenditures. He explained that their *guthi* used to possess 33 *ropanī* of land in Bisvaṃmarā, with many tenants, but nowadays all of them have stopped paying *kut* except for a Tāmāṅg tenant, who cultivates nine *ropanī* of their *guthi* land. He pays a regular nine *muri* of *kut* to them, as he is a religious practitioner. Since their expenditure exceeds twenty thousands rupees, the income from their land is far from sufficient. Once the *guthi* tried to acquire financial assistance from the Guthi Corporation (GC), but this did not work easily. If they would have to depend on the present sources of income only, it would become

impossible to continue the *guthi*. The *guthi* members have to meet the expenses from their own pockets each year. For this reason they might in the end be compelled to stop performing their duties altogether.

A record at the GC shows that the Laso *guthi* had 21 *ropanī* six *ānā* and three *paisā* land with an annual income of 21 *murī*, fifteen *pathī*, four *mānā* unhusked rice, one *murī*, two *pathī*, three *mānā*, four *muṭhī* wheat and three rupees five *paisā* one *dām* in cash. The functions assigned to this *guthi* are identical to the Lasakusa *guthi*.<sup>13</sup>

### ***Tisābicāḥ guthi* (the Associations for looking after the ornaments)**

There are many *guthi* in Sankhu entrusted with the task of taking care of the ornaments offered to the goddess Vajrayoginī or to subsidiary deities. It used to be common to constitute a *guthi* when somebody offered a substantial amount of ornaments to any god or goddess, in order to look after the maintenance of these ornaments. There used to be many *Tisābicāḥ guthi* in Sankhu, of which only a few are still functional. Usually, the task of such a *guthi* is to clean the ornaments once or twice a year and to hold a feast for the occasion.

Instead of describing all the *Tisābicāḥ guthi*, I should first mention the nature and function of the most important *Tisābicāḥ guthi* in Sankhu. This *guthi*'s task is to take care of ornaments deposited at the main temple of Vajrayoginī. The nature of this *guthi* is different from that of the others, because the members are seen as paid employees of the Guthi Corporation since 1964. However, the task of the *guthi* has been continued by the same families for several generations, and called a *Tisābicāḥ guthi*. There used to be 5 members in this *guthi*, but only two of them continue their duties after they experienced an internal conflict four years ago. Two other members are taking care of the *matu*, a crown of the processional statue of Vajrayoginī (Mhāsukhvāḥ māju). The major duty of the *guthi* members of this *guthi* is to be witness when the Vajrācārya priests in the temple shift their turn (*pāḥ*).

The priests' turn in the temple changes once a week, so the members of this *guthi* have to be present on the site to count the ornaments and hand them over to the new *pāḥlā*. The priest who takes his turn in the temple has to take responsibility for these ornaments during the period he remains there. More than nine hundred pieces of ornaments have to be counted, as one of the *guthi* members explained. There are many gold ornaments, but most are made of silver while many of them are studded with precious stones. Most of these ornaments belong to Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, the red

faced mother who is the fixed statue of Vajrayoginī in the main temple of Vajrayoginī. Others belong to Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, the yellow faced-mother, who is the processional statue of Vajrayoginī. The *pāhlā* can put as many ornaments as he likes on the statues in the temple during his turn. Inside the temple, enormous amounts of ornaments are kept sealed in five big copper jars, two big iron drums and an iron safe. They have remained secure till now, one of the members said. Since these were locked up and sealed in the presence of government representatives, they do not have to be counted every week. Locking up of the ornaments is meant to give more protection. It also reduced the burden of counting the ornaments.

The rule is that the *pāhlā* must replace anything that is lost during his turn. However, a common proverb among the people in Sankhu is that ornaments belonging to the gods and goddesses are food for the priest.<sup>14</sup> The main sanctum of Vajrayoginī is accessible only to the priests, therefore practically nobody else can be held responsible if anything is lost. Some people think that being the guardians of the goddess, the priests are permitted by the goddess herself to take away ornaments for their own needs. But most people think these remarks are made mostly against the priests to tease them. According to the members of Tisābicāḥ *guthi*, there is little chance for the priests to take away any ornaments, which are under their supervision. The possibility of their loss exists, however, if people offer ornaments without having them properly recorded, which is not unlikely, as many devotees do not take the trouble to have their offerings recorded. In many cases, when anything is lost from the temple, the priests who were in charge at the time of the incident are immediately suspected. Several times it happened that a priest in charge of the temple proved to have stolen minor but valuable statues. If it is proven that the priest did the theft, he will be dismissed from receiving future turns in the temple, which, depending on his crime can be for life. However, his family members are not penalised for his misconduct, so a father or his sons still continue to receive their turn. Local people compel the Vajrācārya priests to take such actions.

On 20 August 1997, when I was doing my fieldwork, a small statue of Vasundharā was stolen from the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple. It was a new statue, replaced after the old statue was stolen during the 1960s. People in Sankhu immediately suspected the priest who was in charge of the temple at that time. Their argument was that since visitors reported the loss early in the morning, nobody else could be blamed but the *pāhlā* priest himself. So the people in Sankhu immediately accused the *pāhlā* priest of the theft. However, there was no evidence to convict him, so the police was not willing to take him into custody but the people demonstrated on the street

to force them to do so. After some days he was released, though people did not stop suspecting him of the theft. On the other hand, most members of the priestly families claim him to be an honest person. As one of the priests told me, it is highly unlikely for any priest who is in charge of the temple to steal, because each time it happens, the priest in charge has to bear the anger and insult of the people. He thought the allegation against the priest in charge at the temple at the time of the theft was not reasonable.

The crown (*matu*) of the main processional statue (Mhāsukhvāḥ māju) is kept in the eldest Vajrācārya's home in an iron trunk with two locks. The key of one of these locks is kept with the members of the Tisābicāḥ *guthi* and another is kept with the eldest Vajrācārya priest. Once a year, the trunk is opened to bring out the *matu* for the festival of Vajrayoginī and at the end of the festival it is locked up again in the same trunk.

The members of this *guthi* are three Śreṣṭha families (two Besaḥ and a Kārki) and a Joṣī (a Newar Hindu priest-astrologer). For their duties, the Guthi Corporation awards three *murī* of paddy per year to each of the *guthi* members. The members also receive half of the offerings received by the goddess Vasundharā on the day of the Pañjārām festival when her procession takes place in Sankhu. The Vajrācārya priests take the other half.<sup>15</sup>

Another important Tisābicāḥ *guthi* is under the charge of a traditional army-guard (*mahām*).<sup>16</sup> The nature of this *guthi* is not like that of an ordinary *guthi*. It has the responsibility for looking after the ornaments of the processional statues and the main crown (*matu*) of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju at the time of the procession of Vajrayoginī. It is the same crown as mentioned above. The Mahām has to pick up the *matu* of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju from the eldest Vajrācārya's home one day before the procession starts. On that day the statues are brought down from the temple sanctuary to the town, in the presence of the local VDC chiefs and other gentlemen from Sankhu. The *pāhlā* priest has to takeover the responsibility of the ornaments worn by these statues. However, at the time of transferring the statues from temple to palanquin and palanquin to *dyo sataḥ* the chief Mahām takes over the responsibility. As soon as the processional statues are placed at their respective places in the *dyo sataḥ*, the responsibility shifts to the Vajrācārya priests who guard the statues during the festival. On the last day of the festival, when the processional statues are carried back to the temple, the Mahām has to hand over all ornaments to be stored in the temple and to carry back the crown to the eldest priest's house.

Each year, the Mahām receives 50 *pāthī* of paddy from the Guthi Corporation, which he has to share with his assistant.

### ***Matu guthi* (the Crown Association)**

This *guthi* is comparable to Tisābicāḥ *guthi*. However, its task is to take care of a crown dedicated to Mahākāla Bhairava situated at the foot of the stairs leading up to the Vajrayoginī temple. It is a *guthi* of four members established by their common ancestor Bhimadhan. This *guthi*, which does not receive any financial support from the Guthi Corporation, is also called *niji guthi* or private association; its members are all Śreṣṭha. This *guthi* has an annual income of one *murī* and five *pāthī* of paddy. Every year, three days before the start of the festival of Vajrayoginī, they worship with a goat sacrifice at the Mahākāla shrine. Once every four years each member in turn arranges the materials for worship and sacrifice. On the day of worship, family members of the person whose turn it is and a Vajrācārya priest accompany the four members of the *guthi*, with a porter to carry utensils to the temple. Prior to the worship and the sacrifice, they take the *matu* from the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī, where it remains during other times of the year.

First of all, their task is to wash and clean the crown, then to put it on top of the pointed stone triangle representing Mahākāla. It remains there until they finish the worship and the sacrifice. This is the only time in the year that the crown is put on Mahākāla. Then they start the worship and sacrifice. The Guru maṇḍala (Gellner 1991:161-97) worship and the preparation of soot from an oil lamp are essential on this occasion. At the end of the sacrifice the priest distributes flowers, red and yellow powder and soot as blessings (*prasād*) from Mahākāla to all members of the *guthi* and the family members of the *pāhlā*. In return, he receives a fee (*dakṣiṇā*) from them and it being a gift from the family involved, sometimes as much as 200 rupees, about \$ 2.50, formerly only a *paisā* or two. The *guthi* also offers worship to all other deities in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, including the main statue of Vajrayoginī and her processional statue after their worship at the Mahākāla. After the worship they consume festive food, *samaybaji*, which must include the neck of a sacrificed goat (*gaḥcā*).

### ***Thekedār guthi* (Associations of Contractors)**

In 1964, with the introduction of the Guthi Corporation, many *rāj guthi* that used to be run by individuals came under its control. In many cases, this interference resulted in the liquidation of *guthi* and their traditional duties, while in some cases the Guthi Corporation continued to support traditional duties by providing a certain amount of money or materials to a person appointed by the Corporation. An appointee carried out the *guthi*-

tasks; the *guthi* is known as Thekedār or Thekkā *guthi* in Sankhu, and the person in charge is known by the name of *thekedār*. *Thekedārs* are appointed by a tender system or by a mutual understanding between the Guthi Corporation and a *thekedār*. A *thekedār*'s intention is to make some profit from a *guthi*. In several instances, *thekedār* abandoned *guthi*, as they did not pay them sufficient money to maintain the *guthi*. In certain cases in Sankhu, local VDCs have taken over such tasks from the Guthi Corporation, and this happens when nobody takes interest to become a *thekedār*. The *guthi* related to the Taleju temple (see below Taleju *guthi*) have been taken over by the Pukhulāchi VDC, a *guthi* related to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa (see below Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi*) by the Vajrayoginī VDC and some of the *guthi* related to the festival of Vajrayoginī have been taken over by all three VDCs of Sankhu. Once the old *thekedārs* abandoned their work, nobody stepped in, so the local VDCs were forced to show their support for the continuation of religious traditions in the town. In order to win people's support in an election it is necessary for the VDC members to show their concern for the upkeep of traditions. These *guthi*, which the VDC takes care, are also known by the name VDC *guthi*.

### ***Kha guthi***

In Sankhu, people remember, the existence of a *guthi* for the maintenance of the palanquins of Vajrayoginī, called '*kha guthi*'. Since the Guthi Corporation delegated this task to a contractor (*thekedār*) it began to be called *Thekkā guthi*. The contractor has to prepare the palanquins for the festival, for which he has to employ a labourer force. After the completion of the festival it is his task to store the palanquins until the next year. In 1998, a store was built at the bottom of the 108 stone steps leading up to the temple, in which the palanquins are stored to protect them from rain and theft. In the past, they used to be kept at a ground floor of one of the rest places situated in front of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple. When a palanquin becomes very old and needs replacement, the contractor makes a request to the Guthi Corporation.

### ***Cakra pūjā guthi***

The same person who took over the tasks of Kha *guthi* also takes over the tasks of performing of *cakra pūjā*. For this he receives money from the Guthi Corporation. Because the money he received was usually insufficient to cover his expenses, he always criticised the Corporation.<sup>17</sup>



However, most people believe that a *thekedār* always receives more money than the amount of his real expenses and makes a profit.

The Guthi Corporation has a record of the Cakra pūjā guthi dated 1937 AD. It states that the guthi had fourteen *ropanī* and ten *ānā* of land with an annual income of nineteen *murī*, sixteen *pāthī*, four *mānā* and two *muṭhī* unhusked rice. Expenses of the *guthi* were recorded as twelve *murī*, one *pāthī*, a *mānā* of rice in kind and twenty-four rupees seventy-eight *paisā* in cash.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Jātrā guthi***

In Sankhu, the announcement of the festival in town, the arrangements of bringing the Royal Sword from the old Royal Palace of Kathmandu, the offering of sacrifices at Iṃlā Gaṇeśa and Mahākāla Bhairava, the offering of new attires to the processional statues of Vajrayoginī together with other statues at the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī, Jogeśvar at the Jogeśvar temple and of Vasundharā at the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, are some of the important duties which have been taken over jointly by the three VDCs of Sankhu turn by turn. This *guthi* is also responsible for carrying out the King's *bicāḥ pūjā* and the Queen's *bicāḥ pūjā* after the completion of the festival. This Thekkā *guthi* managed by the VDCs is also known by the name Vajrayoginī procession *guthi* (*Jātrā guthi*). However, as this *guthi*'s responsibility lies solely on the elected head of the VDC, there are no other members in this *guthi*. Each year, the turn to observe these duties shifts from one to another VDC, according to the residence of the processional statues in town.<sup>19</sup> For the expenses incurred in carrying out these duties, the VDCs receive money from the Guthi Corporation. The contribution they used to receive was so little that the VDC or Head of the VDC (*Pradhānpamca*), each time, had to spend money from his own pocket, as one ex-head of the Pukhulāchī VDC, Ananda Bahadur Śreṣṭha, told me. During his tenure, he said, he succeeded in increasing the sum to fifteen thousand rupees, but it was still insufficient to cover the expenses.

### ***Ilām guthi* (the Association of the Canopy)**

This is a Śreṣṭha's *guthi* consisting of five members, whose main duty it is to hang a cloth canopy at the Svāmlā sub-quarter of Dhomlā quarter during the festival of Vajrayoginī. The hanging of the canopy is done on the day the processional statues are brought down from the temple to the town. It is hung high over a lotus-shaped stone paved on the road. On the day of bringing down the procession of Vajrayoginī to town from the temple the

priests have to embark on the palanquins of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju and Cibhā as soon as they arrive close to this stone or below the canopy. On the day of carrying back the processional statues to the temple, the priests on the palanquins must jump down from the palanquins before they cross the same point. On the same morning, when they hang the canopy, the *guthi* members worship at the Gaṇeśa shrine with a goat sacrifice outside the Dhomlā gate. The *guthi* members perform a *pūjā* at the house of the *pāhlā*, where they also prepare a feast. The head of the sacrificed goat is divided among the members of the *guthi* as in other cases. On the last day of the festival, after the processional statues of Vajrayoginī are carried back to her temple in Gumbāhāḥ, the *guthi* removes the canopy.

The same *guthi* also hangs a canopy at the courtyard on the side of Śālinadī River, where the month-long yearly festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa takes place in Jan./Feb. This is done on the third of Pauṣa Kṛṣṇa after a *pūjā* at Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. On the last day of the Mādhavanārāyaṇ festival they remove the canopy, and after the removal they sacrifice a cock to the Bhimsen shrine, which is located about sixty steps west of the river.

This *guthi* used to possess eight *ropanī* of land cultivated by a tenant. As the tenant has stopped paying revenue (*kut*) recently, the *guthi* is about to stop functioning.

### ***Musyāḥ guthi* (the Association of Torches)**

Musyāḥ is a torch made of a bundle of rags rolled around a pole and carried around during festivals. The *guthi* received its name because it supplies these torches. Recently, the Musyāḥ *guthi* ceased to function due to a lack of funding. It used to have nine members who carried a torch during the procession of Vajrayoginī. They also distributed festive food (*samaybaji*) to those coming with the palanquin at Kolāgāl, on the way from the temple to the town. In addition, they had to smear the floor of the *dyo sataḥ* with red clay and cow dung before the arrival of the processional statues. There they used to draw a *maṇḍala* in rice powder (*potāy*) for each statue at the spot where it was to be placed. They were also responsible for bringing the processional statues inside the *dyo sataḥ* and for placing them on their seats. In the evening the members of the *guthi* held a pancake feast (*catāmari bhvay*).

Its members were Śreṣṭhas. The founder of this *guthi* was an ancestor of one of the *guthi* members. It used to have an income of 25 *pāthī* of paddy, later decreased to 15 *pāthī*, which was insufficient to run the *guthi*, so the *pāhlā* had to incur the expenses each year. It led the members to abandon the *guthi*. At present, only one member of this *guthi*, who is a

descendant of its founder, still performs a worship of the deities in a simplified manner in the name of the *guthi*.

### ***Ārati guthi* (the Association for Light)**

Most *guthi* in Sankhu consist of members of only one caste. The *Ārati guthi* however, has members of two castes: two Vajrācārya and six Śreṣṭha. The main function of this *guthi* is to put light on the standing lamp (*tvādevā*) in front of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju for four days after *mū jātrā*, the main procession of Vajrayoginī. About one and a half kilos of *butter* (ghee) and a few litres of mustard oil are purchased for this occasion. On two other occasions they have to offer light on the brass lamps attached around the pagoda temples of Vajrayoginī and the Jogeśvar: on the full-moon day of Kārtik (Oct./Nov.) and on the day of Silācarhe (February). They also offer light to the processional statues of Vajrayoginī at the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple during these two days. On those occasions they also organise a feast. On the day following the performance of these two tasks they bring blessings (*prasād*) of flowers to one Śreṣṭha family in Sankhu whose ancestors endowed land to this *guthi*.

### ***Jogi phalcā guthi* (Association of the Jogi's rest place)**

On the day the processional statues are brought down from the Vajrayoginī temple to the town, the Jogi *guthi* distribute *samaybaji* at Kolāgāḥ *phalcā*. As the distribution of the *samaybaji* takes place at this rest place (*phalcā*), the *guthi* is also known by the name Kolāgāḥ *phalcā guthi*. Whoever passes the place on that occasion receive festive food from the hands of the Jogi *guthiyār*. It includes boiled eggs, boiled meat, beaten rice, fried soybeans, ginger and garlic.

In the morning, the *guthi* members worship at the Vajrayoginī temple, and in the afternoon they distribute *samaybaji* and in the evening they feast. The *guthi* has eight members and every year it is one member's turn to organise the worship, the distribution of the festive food and the feast for the members. The *guthi* possessed land and used to receive five *mūrī* of paddy every year from their tenant, but nowadays the tenant pays them only one hundred and fifty rupees, which is far from adequate to meet their expenses. The members therefore have to share the expenses. There are many tensions and even fights between tenants and *guthi* members when the tenants hesitate to pay rent to the *guthi*. Such fights do not favour the *guthi* but in most cases the *guthi* completely loses its income. Therefore the *guthi* members who are able to compromise with their tenants do

receive rent, but those who do not succeed in a compromise, loose their income.

### ***Dāphā guthi* (The Associations of Devotional Drumming)**

*Dāphā* is devotional music in a group with the accompaniment of a two-sided large drum, cymbals and large flutes or trumpets. In Sankhu, there are several *dāphā guthi* who perform their music during the festival of Vajrayoginī and on other occasions. At present, there are four groups of *dāphā* musicians belonging to different castes and to different quarters of Sankhu. Unlike *dāphā* groups in other Newar towns, none of the *dāphā* groups in Sankhu have trumpets. All these four groups of *dāphā* in Sankhu play their music during the festival of Vajrayoginī.

### ***Sāymi or the oil pressers' dāphā guthi***

This is the most prominent *dāphā guthi* in Sankhu. It consists of twenty-nine members. However, it is without a regular source of income, and the *guthi* members have to share the expenses for their common worship, sacrifices and feasts. Depending upon the *guthi* members' decision, a buffalo, a goat or a cock is sacrificed on such an occasion. They perform their *dāphā* music on several occasions each year. Their major performance takes place during the Vajrayoginī festival. In the morning, when the processional statues are brought down to town, they begin playing their music in a rest place close to the Mahākāla shrine in the sanctuary of Vajrayoginī. On this occasion, as the performing continues, the elder members of the *guthi* carry out worship with a cock sacrifice to Mahākāla. After the worship, a feast is prepared at the *pāhlā*'s home. Every evening, the Saymi *dāphā guthi* musicians perform their music in an open space in the quarter where the processional statues are kept during the festival. They conclude their performance during the last evening of the festival when the processional statues are placed in their palanquins to be returned to their forest abode.

The Saymi *dāphā guthi* also worships at Vajrayoginī in December (Pauṣa Kṛṣṇa Carhe or Diśicarhe). On that day, they sacrifice a goat at the shrine of Mahākāla and worship the goddess Vajrayoginī. After that, they worship Nāsaḥ dyo, the god of music, dance and drama in the Ipātōl quarter. At a courtyard in Ipātōl there is a niche on a wall where three round-shaped stones are kept as the Nāsaḥ dyo. In the afternoon, after the worship of Nāsaḥ dyo, the members consume *samaybaji* and *sikāhbhvay*, a

feast in which the parts of a sacrificed goat's head is eaten by the elder members of the *guthi*.

During the month of Kārtik (October/November), this *dāphā guthi* performs a month-long *dāphā* in the Ipātōl quarter at a rest place adjoining the Gaṇeśa shrine of the quarter.

### ***Devī Dāphā***

This *dāphā guthi* is a multi-caste *dāphā*, whose major performances take place during the Devī dances in Sankhu during September. As one of the major *dāphā* in Sankhu, this *guthi* also performs *dāphā* music during the festival of Vajrayoginī.

### ***Dhoṃlā Dāphā Khalah***

This is another *dāphā* group that performs its music during the Vajrayoginī festival. It is also known by the name of Gvārā Dāphā, as the members of this *guthi* belong to one group of Śreṣṭha with the nickname Gvārā. This group also performs its music at the Phisaḥ sub quarter of the Dhoṃlā quarter in the month of Kāttik (October/November).

### ***Suntol Dāphā Khalah***

This *dāphā* performs its music during the festival of Vajrayoginī as other *dāphā* groups of Sankhu do. Suntol Dāphā belongs to a group of Śreṣṭha of the Suntol quarter. This *guthi* is without any income, so the members share the expenses for their annual feasts. This group used to perform its music at Suntol quarter in the month of Kāttik, but the tradition has been discontinued since a decade ago. However, they are continuing their performances during the festival of Vajrayoginī.

### ***Mākaḥ Bicāḥ pūjā guthi* (Final Worship Association of the Mākaḥ)**

Mākaḥ is a nickname of some Śreṣṭha families in Sankhu. In this *guthi* Mākaḥ consanguine are included, so it is called Mākaḥ bicāḥ pūjā *guthi*. This *guthi* consists of eight Mākaḥ families of the Sālkhā quarter and the *pāḥ* (turn) changes among these members.

This *guthi* performs Vajrayoginī *bicāḥ pūjā* five days after the other people of Sankhu conclude theirs. In the past they used to employ a Karmācārya (*ācāju*), a Hindu Newar priest, but nowadays they have to employ a local Joṣī priest, because there is no *ācāju* priest left in Sankhu, and it is not easy to invite one from elsewhere. On the day of their *bicāḥ pūjā*, all members of the *guthi* as well as the relatives and friends of the *pāhlā* go to Vajrayoginī to perform the *bicāḥ pūjā*. They perform their *bicāḥ pūjā* at the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple where other people also perform theirs. After the *pūjā* they have a feast at the rest place adjoining the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple. This *guthi* has twenty-two *murī* and ten *pāthī* of paddy as its annual income.

### Other *guthi* related to the Vajrayoginī Festival

Many *guthi*, which had various tasks to perform during the festival of Vajrayoginī, have vanished in the past six decades. Some of them carried torches during the procession, some performed special worship to the processional statues and others offered light at the place where the processional statues were kept. Many *guthi* that performed music also disappeared. The Śreṣṭha ran *guthi* have mostly disappeared. The causes for the disappearance of such *guthi* were financial constraints or quarrels among the *guthi* members or both.

Besides the above-mentioned *guthi*, which have or had direct connections with the festival of Vajrayoginī, there are also many *sī guthi*, funeral associations, whose major annual sacrificial worship and feasts coincide with the festival of Vajrayoginī. Despite the fact that they consider Bhairava as their patron god, they do carry out their worship at the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī and the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple simultaneously with a sacrificial worship at the shrine of Bhairava. Most *guthi* carry out their sacrificial worship at Mahākāla Bhairava who is considered the Kṣetrapāl or the lord protector of the area of the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. No bloody sacrifices are allowed at the temple of the goddess Vajrayoginī or at her Gumbāhāḥ shrine, but the *sī guthi* are obliged to worship them on the day of their major feasts. The goddess is not only considered the mother of the world, but also the protector and, if need be, the destroyer of the world too. The observance of the major feasts of the *sī guthi* on the first day of the Vajrayoginī festival conveys the relation between the goddess and the *sī guthi*. These *sī guthi* do not have any remarkable duties during the festival, by contrast to the *sī guthi* of the Manandhar of Talāchi and Prajāpati of Jyātha in Kathmandu. Both the Manandhar and Prajāpati *sī guthi* feasts are connected with their ritual

duties vis-à-vis the goddess Indrāyaṇī during her festival in Kathmandu (Van den Hoek & Shrestha 1992). The members of the *sī guthi* in Sankhu are nevertheless morally obliged to provide every possible assistance to accomplish the festival of Vajrayoginī. No member of Sankhu society is supposed to neglect her and her divine power, for her anger will inevitably bring disaster. Only by pleasing the goddess Vajrayoginī one can achieve one's prosperity on earth and later in heaven.

### ***Guthi* related to the goddess Vajrayoginī and her sanctuary**

There are many *guthi*, which are connected to Vajrayoginī and her sanctuary but not for her festival. After our observation of those *guthi*, which are related to the festival of Vajrayoginī, I shall sum up other *guthi* related to the goddess Vajrayoginī and her sanctuary.

### ***Sakhāykhalaḥ guthi***

This *guthi* has twelve members. Its main function was to provide night guards at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. According to a rotating schedule four among the twelve members of the *guthi* used to guard the sanctuary. During their turn, these four members had to sleep at an open rest place (*phalcā*) situated west of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī, and vigil one at a time. In the mid-1960s, this *guthi* stopped its activities, because the police took over the task following a theft at the temple. With the assistance of the *guthi* members, the thieves were caught. After the police started to guard the temple, the *Sakhāykhalaḥ guthi* members felt that their service was no longer necessary and they decided to end their traditional duties of guarding the temple sanctuary at night. Although the *guthi* no longer performs its tasks, the members continue their regular annual worship and feast at the temple once a year. It possesses 48 *ropanī* of land and the members of the *guthi* receive equal shares of the land revenues.

An inscription dated 1655 (775 NS) attached to the plinth of the Jogeśvara temple in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary provides lists of land and duties of the *sakhāsa khalaka* association towards the god Jogeśvara and goddess Vajrayoginī. This inscription states to the establishment of the *guthi*.

### ***Thā pūjā guthi* (Association to carry out a special worship)**

Thā pūjā is a special worship for a goddess carried out at certain temples.<sup>20</sup> In Sankhu, people carry out *thā pūjā* for Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. Any individual or *guthi* can carry out such worship. Individuals do so any time of the year to appease the goddess, but the *guthi* related to *thā pūjā* perform their worship on a fixed day of the year. Usually a Thā pūjā is performed secretly, so it is also known as *gupti pūjā* or secret worship. Only those members of the *guthi* who have gone through ritual initiation (*dikṣā*) can attend such secret worship and no others are allowed to see it. Among different Newar castes, priestly castes like Brahmin, Vajrācārya, Karmācārya, Joṣī and some of the Śreṣṭha undergo *dikṣā*. There are many *thā pūjā guthi* in Sankhu, whose duty it is to perform secret worship at the shrine of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju: the Thāru Thā pūjā *guthi*, Baḥsi *thā pūjā guthi*, Dvāre Thā pūjā *guthi* and Sigvāy Thā pūjā *guthi* are among those still functioning. In the past, the government, i.e. the representatives of the royal palace, used to perform four Thā pūjā at the temple annually, but all government *pūjā* have been discontinued long ago.

The Guthi Administrative office at the Bhadrakālī or the present Guthi Corporation has three records of such *thāpūjā* or *gupti pūjā guthi* belonging to Vajrayoginī. One was registered at the Corporation in 1916 AD but the date of its establishment is not mentioned, however it records the expenses it had in the year 1909 AD as nine *murī*, fifteen *pāthī*, six *mānā* of rice and 287 rupees 83 *paisā* and two *dām* cash. It had fifty *ropanī* lands.<sup>21</sup> Another Thā pūjā *guthi* registered at the Corporation in 1918 AD has records dating back to 1852 and 1890 AD which says that it possessed 25 *ropanī* of land with an income of twenty-seven *murī*, sixteen *pāthī*, four *mānā* unhusked rice annually.<sup>22</sup> Three persons named Siddhilal, Harilal and Vishnulal with an endowment of nine *ropanī* and ten *ānā* of land registered the third one in 1932 AD.<sup>23</sup> Below, I shall give a brief description of those Thā pūjā *guthi* of Sankhu, which are still functioning.

#### ***Thāru thā pūjā guthi***

The name of this *guthi* is derived from the family nickname of a Śreṣṭha caste in Sankhu. Thāru is also the name of an ethnic group living throughout the Southern belt of Nepal. Once every year, the Thāru *thā pūjā guthi* performs its worship at the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju in June (Bhalabhala Aṣṭamī). It consists of eight Śreṣṭha members. The *pāhlā* has to arrange the necessary items for the worship. The secret worship is carried out in a corner on the first floor of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju shrine.



On the day of worship all the members go to the temple. The *pāhlā*'s family members also visit the temple and help to prepare food for the feast. A Buddhist Vajrācārya acts as the priest during this worship.

A *guthi* member told me that this *guthi* was established with a land endowment made by a widow who was left without any sons. She wished to obtain heavenly merit by creating this *guthi*. This *guthi* receives 50 *pāthī* of paddy from the tiller who cultivates the *guthi* land.

### ***Baḥsi thā pūjā guthi***

Baḥsi or peach was given as a nickname to one of the forefathers of a Baḥsi in Sankhu who loved peaches. Afterwards, Baḥsi became their family nickname. The Baḥsi families in Sankhu claim their ancestors migrated from Bhaktapur. Members of this *guthi* are cousins of this lineage. This *guthi* performs a secret worship at the shrine of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. It counts four members, and they organise the worship in turn once a year. On the day of worship, the members as well as the family members of the *pāhlā* go to the temple where they feast. Since the tenant on the land endowed to the *guthi* no longer pays rent to the *guthi*, the *pāhlā* has to bear all the expenditures.

### ***Sigvāy thā pūjā guthi***

This *guthi* carries out worship in March (Cillāgā Aṣṭamī). It consists of four members from one lineage called Sigvāy (brown moustache). Preparations for worship begin only on the day preceding it: on this day, the *pāhlā* takes only one meal. On the day of worship, all the members carry a basket with worship items (*kalaḥ pūjā*) to the temple. First, a goat is sacrificed at the Mahākāla shrine and a feast is prepared for all the family members of the *guthi* members. The *pāhlā* of the *guthi* performs a *śrāddha* in the name of the *guthi* founder before they perform *thā pūjā* worship. Every member of the *guthi* has to contribute some food, which is offered to the founder of the *guthi*. However, only those members of the *guthi* who have been ritually initiated are eligible to witness the secret worship at the shrine of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. A Hindu Newar Karmācārya priest from Bhaktapur performs priestly duties during this occasion. Not even the Vajrācārya priests are allowed to see the worship because of its secret nature. After the worship the members consume a *sīkāḥbhvay*, then the turn (*pāḥ*) for the next year's worship is handed over to one of the members of the *guthi*.

Today, this *guthi* has an annual income of thirty *pāthī* of paddy; it used to be seven *murī* in the past. To combine *thā pūjā* with a *śrāddha* of an ancestor is unusual. Normally, the *Śrāddha* of an ancestor is separated from other kinds of worship. However, this *guthi* performs the *śrāddha* in the name of the person who endowed land to the *guthi*, because that person has no offspring to perform *śrāddha* for him. As a devotee of the goddess Vajrayoginī, his wish was that the *guthi* perform a *thā pūjā* at the temple.

### ***Dvāre thā pūjā guthi***

The members of this *guthi* came from a *dvāre* family. *Dvāre* was a position designated to a village head during the Rana time, and it ended with the end of the Rana regime in 1951. As will be clear below, this *guthi* is similar to *Sigvāy thā pūjā guthi*. According to a member of this *guthi* one of their forefathers' brothers called Yajurdhan had no offspring so he founded and provided this *guthi* with some land. This *guthi* has four members and they are all cousins. Like the *Sigvāy thā pūjā guthi*, it has to perform a *śrāddha* in the name of the founder of the *guthi* together with their *thā pūjā* at the shrine of *Mhāsukhvāḥ māju*. It carries out worship on *Caitra Śukla Aṣṭamī* (March/April), and it also used to invite a *Karmācārya* priest from *Bhaktapur*. Since the *Karmācārya* stopped coming, they employed a *Joṣī* (Newar Hindu priest and astrologer) from *Sankhu* for the occasion. When the *Joṣī* also stopped attending they were forced to employ a *Vajrācārya* as their priest.

On the day of their worship, a goat is sacrificed at the shrine of *Mahākāla*. The head of the sacrificed goat is divided among the members at the *sikāḥbhvay* in the evening. At the end of the feast, the responsibility of the *guthi* is handed over to one of the other members of the *guthi*.

### ***Sakhvā Pāyegu guthi* (Association of Whitewashing)**

*Sakhvā Pāyegu guthi* is also known by the name *Cuna guthi*. It has nine members, and each member in turn has a year-long duty to carry out this daily worship. The *guthi* carries out worship (*kalah pūjā*) at the temple every morning. The main function of this *guthi* is to paint the lion statues situated outside the pagoda temple of *Vajrayoginī*. Once every year, on the day of *Āsāḍha Saptamī*, the painting is done. On that day, a fire sacrifice used to be carried out in front of the gate of the pagoda temple of *Vajrayoginī*. They built a temporary hut (*balcā*) at the temple site where they spent the night preceding the fire sacrifice. But this tradition has long since been discontinued. The *guthi* also had the task of performing a fire

sacrifice four days before the processional statues of Vajrayoginī are brought to town, which was also discontinued long ago. At present, they only symbolically smear white paint over the lions and take a feast at the temple.

The late Rana Prime Minister, Chandra Shamser endowed the *guthi* with 48 *ropanī* of land. However, after the 1964 land reforms in Nepal, it lost a large part of its income, because nowadays the tenants who cultivate these lands pay very little rent to the *guthi*. As a record shows, the White Washing association had twelve members, fifty-four *ropanī*, ten *ānā* of land, with an annual income of forty-nine *murī*, eleven *pāthī*, two *mānā* and eight *muṭhī* of unhusked rice.<sup>24</sup>

### *Mecā guthi*

This is a six-member *guthi* of the Joṣī and the Śreṣṭha, whose task it is to worship at the temple of the goddess Vajrayoginī once a year on Phālguna Śukla Āṣṭamī (February/March). On the day of the worship it used to sacrifice a buffalo (*mecā*) at the Mahākāla shrine, a tradition, which has been abandoned because of financial constraints. However, the yearly worship at the temple is still continued.

A record dated 1937 (1994 VS) at the GC shows that this *guthi* had five *ropanī*, ten *ānā*, four *paisā* of land with an annual income of four *murī*, twelve *pāthī*, seven *mānā* six *muṭhī* of unhusked rice, three *pathī* unpolished rice, 21 *paisā*, three *dām* cash. Its expenses were recorded as one *murī* five *pāthī* of rice and fourteen rupees forty *paisā*. An accompanying note says that this *guthi* was founded in 1923 (1980 VS).<sup>25</sup>

### *Kisānī guthi*

In general, farmers in Nepal are called Kisān (Nep.), and in Newar society, they are called Jyāpu. Within the Jyāpu caste there are several sections. One of these carries out cremation services for high caste Newars. In other Newar towns they are known by the name *gvam* whereas in Sankhu, they are called Kisānī, a word derived from Kisān. The Kisānī in Sankhu have stopped their cremation duties, while in most other Newar towns the *gvam* still observe their duties.

In Sankhu, there is a *guthi* called Kisānī *guthi* that has eleven members. It carries out its annual worship at the temple of Vajrayoginī in January (Pauṣa), when they also feast. On this day a buffalo is sacrificed at Mahākāla shrine. In most other *guthi*, the eldest member becomes the chief (*thakāli*), but this one has a tradition of appointing as its chief the

person who receives his turn (*pāḥ*) in that year. It does not possess any land of its own as a source of income, so the members have to share the expenses of their annual feasts.

### ***Guṃlābājaṃ guthi* (the Association of Guṃlā month music)**

Guṃlā is a Nepalese lunar month dedicated to the visit of various Buddhist shrines and temples in July/August. In Sankhu during this month people visit the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, and the main Buddhist sites around the town. The association that carries out a month-long worship playing music is known as Guṃlābājaṃ *guthi*. With their music of drums (*dhā*), cymbals and a pair of Jogi musicians, the Guṃlābājaṃ groups visit Vajrayoginī sanctuary and worship all the deities in and around the temples. Then they go back to the town to offer worship to all Buddhist shrines and Bāhāḥ situated there. After the end of the month, these *guthi* organise a *Pāru pūjā* to celebrate the conclusion of the month-long worship on the first day of the bright half of the Yaṃlā month. On this day, the *guthi* members organise a big feast.

In Sankhu there are two prominent Guṃlā bājaṃ *guthi* one belonging to the Vajrācārya priests and another belonging to the Saymi, the oil pressers. Because of the lack of income, the Vajrācārya's Guṃlā bājaṃ has performed irregularly in the recent past. But in 1997, they have resumed the tradition of the month-long worship by sharing the expenses. Apart from the costs of the materials for the worship, they have to pay at least two Jogi musicians, whom they employ for a month to accompany them at the time of worship. According to a Jogi informant, they were paid fifty rupees (less than a dollar) each per day for their music in the year 1997. In that year, when the musicians suggested hiring two more Jogi for the day of Sāpāru, an important day during the Guṃlā month, the Vajrācārya refused to do so, because they had no money for extra musicians.

Since they have lost all *guthi* lands, they share all these costs among themselves. The young generation is not willing to spend their mornings for a full month in observing a tradition. The older generation, however, believes that this is a religious duty and therefore essential. Being Buddhist priests, it gave them a bad name when they stopped the Guṃlā bājaṃ for a couple of years. As an elderly priest told me, they had to resume the Guṃlā bājaṃ *guthi*, not only for religious merit but also for their own prestige.

The second Guṃlā bājaṃ *guthi* belonging to the Sāymi caste, has maintained its performance till today. It is a twenty-eight-member *guthi* and every year one of the members provides the necessary materials for the Guṃlā month. Every morning, after the completion of the worship, the members go to the *pāhlā*'s home where they receive light snacks. Since this *guthi* does not possess any land, the expenses are borne by the *pāhlā* every day for the whole month. Only on the final day of the month, when they prepare the *pāru pūjā* feast, all members share the costs. A Vajrācārya priest performs priestly duties for this Guṃlā bājaṃ, for which he receives a hundred rupees per day as *dakṣiṇā* or fee. He also sporadically receives rice, wheat and potatoes, money (*kibhu*) from Sāymī households and others as they go round the town everyday. The Sāymi Guṃlā bājaṃ also hires two Jogi musicians to accompany their Guṃlā bājaṃ every morning. They receive fifty rupees each day as their wages from the *pāhlā*.

Besides these two major Guṃlā bājaṃ *guthi*, there is another one belonging to the Nāy, the butcher caste in Sankhu. The Nāy are considered to be unclean caste in Newar society, and no drinking water or cooked food is accepted from them by the other Newar castes. Unlike the Vajrācārya and Sāymi, the Nāy's Guṃlā bājaṃ is of an irregular nature. They show up irregularly; sometimes year after year and sometimes once in every two or three years. Their Guṃlā bājaṃ *guthi* was established only a few decades ago, and frequent quarrels among the members disrupt its regularity. The costs of the worship and the costs of the final feasts are shared by all the members.

A record dated 1930 AD shows that there used to be a Guṃlā bājaṃ *guthi* which had the duty to worship Vajrayoginī and go round the town of Sankhu playing music every morning for a month (from the first of Śrāvan Śudī to first of Bhādra). It had three *ropanī* of land with an income of three *murī* of unhusked rice.<sup>26</sup>

### ***Bhajan guthi* (Associations for Performing Devotional Music)**

At present, there are three *bhajan* groups who perform devotional music at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary every morning. They perform their *bhajan* simultaneously at different *sataḥ* at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. Among them, one is a five-member *guthi*. Its members are three Śreṣṭha, one Vajrācārya and one Giri from the Parvate. Every morning for an hour, they play harmonium, a pair of one-headed drums (*tabalā*) and cymbals and devotional songs at the rest place situated a few metres west of the pagoda

temple of Vajrayoginī. For his or her duties each year, each member of the *guthi* receives fifty *pāthī* of paddy from the Guthi Corporation. When the musical instruments wear out or need minor repairs, they receive money from the Corporation. This *guthi* celebrates their annual feast in February, the members taking turns to organise it. A record, dated 1934 AD at the Guthi Corporation shows that each *guthi* member used to receive three *murī* and one *pāthī* of unhusked rice every year and it had four Joṣī and one Śreṣṭha members.<sup>27</sup>

Similarly, another *bhajan khalah* (group) performs its *bhajan* for an hour at the rest place (*phalcā*) situated at the south of the Vajrayoginī temple every morning. This group consists of a group of devotional singers from Sankhu. This *guthi* has no income, but the group is determined to perform *bhajan* every morning as part of a vow they have taken. Once a year, in February (Phālguna), they celebrate an annual feast at the temple. This association is open, so everyone who joins the *bhajan* regularly is invited to its yearly feast. Some members, though, are attached permanently to this group for several decades. During the annual feasts, all who join it, share the costs.

The third *bhajan guthi* that performs *bhajan* at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary is of the Jogi. Their *guthi* consists of twelve members, but every morning, each group takes turns to play a musical instrument called *muhāli* at the rest place situated at the west of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī. A drum (*dholak*) player from the Dvaṃ caste always accompanies the Jogi musicians. Each of the members of this *bhajan guthi* received land from the government for their duties. The *guthi* members, however, do not feel obliged to fulfill their traditional duties because since the 1990s, the ownership of the *guthi* land has been registered into its member's names. The younger members of this *guthi* have abandoned their duties of performing music on many occasions, but they are still continuing the *bhajan* at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary every morning. As the eldest Jogi said, they maintained it because Vajrayoginī is their most respected goddess. Yet, he expressed his doubts about the future, because not all the *guthiyār* like to join the *bhajan*.

In the past, everyday at sunrise and sunset a man from Damāi caste played a drum (*nagarā*) at the Guṃbāhāḥ shrine, but in 1978 he abandoned it as he was stopped from being paid for his duty.

At the Guthi Corporation there are two records (*lagat*) dated 1938 and 1939 AD and a letter with a government stamp (*lālmohar*) dated 1818 AD which show that a total of eighty-nine *ropanī*, five *ānā* of land was earmarked as salaries to twelve different musical groups (including Jogi,

Dom, Damāi and Putuvār) who played music for Vajrayoginī on different occasions.<sup>28</sup>

### ***Mañjusrī or Sarasvatī guthi***

Adjacent to the western wall of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī, there is a small temple of Saraśvatī, the goddess of knowledge. The statue of Mañjusrī, who was also called saint Nemunī, was stolen in 1986. The Newars regard her as the Buddhist saint as well as the god of knowledge. Although these two are interchangeable deities in Nepalese pantheon, there used to be two different stone statues inside the same temple at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. To maintain the temple and to care for the image of the deity, the ancestors of a Śreṣṭha family in Sankhu called Phākam established a *guthi*. Nowadays, this *guthi* has only five members; they are all Phākam cousins. Some of its members left the *guthi*, as its income was diminished.

Every year in February (Silācarhe), all members go to the Vajrayoginī temple to worship Mañjusrī/Saraśvatī. The *pāhlā* arranges the necessary things for worship and prepares a feast for the *guthi* members.

### **Former *guthi* related to Vajrayoginī**

Religious *guthi* are mainly dependent on land endowments made by the founders of the *guthi*. Because of their religious nature many *guthi* continued to survive despite inadequate incomes from their land. Others, however, have stopped functioning because of financial problems. We know that the 1964 land reforms considerably reduced the incomes of all *guthi* and it is primarily responsible for the marginalisation or the disappearance of about fifty *guthi*.<sup>29</sup> The second reasons for the collapse of *guthi* are disputes among *guthi* members.

Until a few decades ago, there were several *guthi* that used to have various duties with regard to the goddess Vajrayoginī, but they all have disappeared. Among them, some had to bring torches and distribute festive food (*samaybaji*) at the time of the procession of Vajrayoginī. Many *guthi* that had the duty to perform daily worship at the Vajrayoginī temple also disappeared. The Musyāh, Jātrā pūjā, Khipah, Kalah pūjā, Thā pūjā, Ranabahādur, Mahārāni, Silābu, Vajrayoginī sevā, Nitya pūjā, Punhi, Svāmchāyegu, Mā pūjā *guthi*, Kapu *guthi*, Gaurisankhar *guthi* and Campārohana *guthi* are among the *guthi* that ceased to function. In the following section I shall discuss those *guthi* for which I could obtain some information.

### ***Ranabahadur and Mahārāni guthi (Ranabahadur's and the Queen's Association)***

King Ranabahadur (AD. 1778-1799) established both these *guthi*. One was in his name, the other was in the name of his wife.<sup>30</sup> Four members were appointed to execute the ritual duties of both *guthi*. Among these four members, three were Vajrācārya priests and one was a Śreṣṭha.

In May (Jetha Kṛṣṇa Ṣaṣṭhī and Saptamī), worship and sacrifices used to be carried out on behalf of the Queen. Therefore, this *guthi* was known by the name of Mahārāni *guthi*. On the first day, a duck was sacrificed at the shrine of Guṃ Gaṇeśa situated to the north of the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, and a goat was sacrificed at the shrine of Mahākāla. Then, in the evening, a secret nightly worship (*cā pūjā*) was performed at the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. On the next day, a closing ritual was performed at the temple. On both days the *guthi* members and their family members used to go to the temple and take part in the feasts.

During the festival of Daśain in September (Āśvina Śukla Mahāṣṭamī and Mahānavamī) a similar act of worship was carried out on behalf of king Ranabahadur. To run both *guthi*, king Ranabahadur donated twenty-five *ropanī* of land. The tenants of the land stopped paying rent to the *guthi* members since 1979. The *guthi* members continued their duties of worship and sacrifice anticipating action from the Guthi Corporation for a few years. In the end, they had to stop their duties because the Guthi Corporation took no action at all.

### ***Silābu guthi***

The *guthi* used to have members from each of the 37 Vajrācārya families of Sankhu. This *guthi* had the duty to execute a fire sacrifice at the shrine of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, in front of her processional statue, twice a year. The first fire sacrifice was performed in February (Phālguṇa Śukla Aṣṭamī) and the second in September (Āśvina Śukla Aṣṭamī). On both occasions the *guthi* needed 32 varieties of grains for the fire sacrifice and the eldest Vajrācārya priest's wife had to attend the sacrifice as the head woman (*thakāli nakim*). For her duties she used to receive a new dress on both occasions. The members used to feast on the day of the fire sacrifices. *Pāhlā* Vajrācārya used to perform *yajamān*'s duties, while the eldest Vajrācārya used to act as the priest.

This *guthi* possessed one hundred and eight *ropanī* of land cultivated by tenants around Bālāju, situated about six kilometres north of the old city of Kathmandu. Since the implementation of the 1964 land reforms



programme, this *guthi* too had to face the same fate as many others. The tenants stopped paying rent, so the *guthi* was forced to terminate its tasks.

### ***The Punhi guthi (Full-moon Association)***

This *guthi* used to perform a monthly worship to the goddess Saraśvatī inside a stone cave called the hole of virtues (*dharmapvācā*) situated about twenty-five metres west of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī. Each Vajrācārya family had a member in this *guthi*. Since it performed its worship on the day of the full-moon (*Punhi*), it received the name Punhi *guthi*. Its monthly worship included lighting wicks to Saraśvatī. After the worship the *guthi* members attended a feast. This *guthi* possessed forty-five *ropanī* of land around the Bālāju area, which it lost after the 1964 land reforms. For some years, the Guthi Corporation provided three hundred rupees to continue its regular worship. Reducing the size of the *guthi* to four members sustained it for some years. Later, the Guthi Corporation stopped providing money, which eventually led to the end of this *guthi* also.

A record dated 1918 (1975VS) shows that as far back as 1768 (1845 VS) two priests named Kulismuni and Ratnamuni were responsible for this *guthi*. Every full-moon this *guthi* performed a special worship for the goddess Vajrayoginī and they had feast afterward.<sup>31</sup>

### ***The Nitya pūjā guthi (Association for Daily Worship)***

The Nitya pūjā *guthi* was an association belonging to the Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu. It was responsible for carrying out a daily worship and provided priest guards at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. His Majesty's Government (HMG) Guthi Management Office (*Sri 5 ko Sarkār Guthi Bandovasta Addā*)<sup>32</sup> used to provide this *guthi* with the necessary land and money for the duties it had to carry out. A government document dated July 1937 (VS 1994 Asāḍha 32) entrusted the responsibilities for this *guthi* to the Vajrācārya priests. It specified the sums of money received by the two priests who had to guard the temples and gives a detailed list of land provided to the *guthi* (Sharma 1993). The document states that the *guthi* had a total of 57 *ropanī* of land with an income of 41 *murī* of unhusked rice, eighteen *murī* of unpolished rice, one rupee eighty-four *paisā* annual income for the *nityapūjā*. Its annual expenses in kind were thirty-one *murī* of unhusked rice and two hundred twenty rupee and eighty-two *paisā* in cash. However, the implementation of the 1964 reforms severely disrupted

this *guthi*. It lost its land revenues, and also the cash money, which the *Guthi* office had provided previously.

This *guthi* had the duties of worship and offering of food (*bhog*) to all the deities at Vajrayoginī. The daily duties of this *guthi* were: in the morning, a worship with grains of rice, red and yellow powder, sandalwood paste (*candan*), flower, incense, food (*naibadya*) and at about noon an offering of food (*bhog*), in the afternoon at about three o'clock a worship of all the deities and the sounding of the wooden bell (*lusi* or *sim gam*) in front of the Jogeśvara temple; and at about dusk the lighting of wicks to all the deities (*ārati*). Although the *guthi* revenue has discontinued, the priests were not in a position to disregard their duties towards the deities. They decided to finance the ingredients for daily worship from the offerings made by devotees at the temple. The priest, who takes his turn to guard the temple, took over the responsibilities to carry out daily worship from then onwards. Hence, no interruption of the *guthi* duties occurred in spite of the disbandment of this *guthi*. According to a priest, gods and goddesses must be appeased with daily worship and food, otherwise this may lead to a national calamity causing big hardships to the country, people and the reigning king.

A tax (*poṭā*) note on Vajrayoginī Nitya pūjā *guthi* dated 1852 AD states that only for the purpose of daily worship or *nitya pūjā* 44 *ropanī* of land was destined. To celebrate the anniversary of the Vajrayoginī temple, 25 *ropanī*, eight *ānā*, to the jewellery checkers (Besata) 27 *ropanī*, to the barber (Nau *khānki*) six *ropanī*, to the blacksmith (Nakarmī *khānki*) two *ropanī*, to the trumpeters' (Kāhālyā) *guthi* fifteen *ropanī*, *tvāmu khānki* two *ropanī* and the two *ropanī* to a sweeper Jogi totalling 133 *ropanī* and eight *ānā* of land were endowed.<sup>33</sup> An inscription dated 1817 (937 NS) found in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary also gives an account of the *nitya pūjā* *guthi*.

### ***Svāmchāyegu guthi* (the Flower Offering Associations)**

There used to be several *guthi*, which had the duty to offer flowers to the goddess Vajrayoginī every morning. All of them disappeared because of the loss of income. Among them one *guthi* is recorded at the Guthi Corporation, which was established by the minister (*cautāria*) Mohan Prasad Khanal in 1909.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Mahā pūjā guthi* (the Association of Great Worship)**

A record dated 1809 shows used to be *guthi* called *Mahā pūjā guthi*. King Girvanyuddha's mother Laksmidevī established this *guthi* in 1799 (1856 VS) with an endowment of 115 *ropanī* four *ānā* of land.<sup>35</sup>

### ***Kapu guthi* (the Association of Camphor)**

This is another *guthi* that was related to Vajrayoginī, which has disappeared but found in a *guthi* record dated 1916 (1973 VS). It had four *ropanī* of land and its expenses were one *murī* two *pāthī*, five *mānā* six *muṭhī* unpolished rice.<sup>36</sup>

### ***Gaurisankhar guthi* (the Association of Gaurisankhar)**

Initially Queen Bhuvanlaksmi Malla established the Gaurisaṅkar *guthi*, which was related to, the northern tap at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. A record dated 1926 (1985 VS), tells that it was assigned to a person called Nilakantha Pūjārī to worship the goddess Vajrayoginī daily. It had six *ropanī*, eight *ānā*, and two *paisā* of land.<sup>37</sup>

### ***Campārohana guthi***

Members of this *guthi* used to sacrifice a goat at Vajrayoginī on the third of Āsādhā Badī 3. That consisted of five people. According to a record dated 1941 (1998) it had one *ropanī*, three *ānā* and two *paisā* of land as a source of income.

### ***Khipaḥ guthi***

This association had to tie ropes on the palanquins during the festival of Vajrayoginī. There are four palanquins, which are carried in a procession. It had three *ropanī* and four *ānā* of land.<sup>38</sup>

### ***Sataḥ guthi* (the Association for Rest place)**

An inscription dated 1782 (902 NS) near the cave on the northwest of the Vajrayoginī temple tells that four Karmācārya Bhāro brothers of Kathmandu Kelatol established a rest place and offered 101 rupees to the goddess Vajrayoginī. It instructs the Bhāro families to worship the

goddess every year on the third day of the bright half of the month of Phālgun month together with the celebration of the anniversary of the rest place and the worship of Umāmaheśvara.

### ***Brahman nake guthi* (the Association for Feeding Brahmins)**

An inscription dated 1817 (1874 VS) attached to the right of the tympanum of the Vajrayoginī temple tells that a Brahmin Miśra lady formed a *guthi* consisting of five members to feed ten male and five female Brahmins and to perform worship with a goat sacrifice at the temple of Vajrayoginī on the day of Akṣayaṭṭiyā every year. She endowed three *ropanī* of land for the *guthi*.

### ***Bhākhā pūjā guthi* (Association of Honour and Worship)**

A record dated 1947 (2004 VS) shows that there used to be a *guthi* which had the task to worship Mādhav Nārāyaṇa on the day of bringing down the processional statues to Sankhu. It had ten *ropanī* and eight *ānā* of land. Its tasks were to worship Mādhav Nārāyaṇa on the first and last days of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival in the months of Pohelā and Sillā. Its members also had to worship Vajrayoginī every day during the month of Śrāvan and on nine consecutive days of Navarātra during the festival of Dasain.<sup>39</sup>

### **Other Socio-religious *guthi* in Sankhu**

Apart from the *guthi* related to Vajrayoginī, there are several other *guthi* in Sankhu which are responsible for carrying out various processions of different deities and which perform various ritual activities in the town. Unlike the *guthi* related to Vajrayoginī, most other religious *guthi* in Sankhu do not have royal patronage, grants or subsidies from the Guthi Corporation. In the following sections brief descriptions of such *guthi* will be given. The descriptions are according to the ritual activities they are performing which are linked to the ritual lunar calendar that begins in Kachalā or Kārtik (October/November). However, *guthi* like Busādam *guthi* and Bhajan *guthi*, Baḥsi Gharagharanā *guthi*, Bhujimpu *guthi* and Nāy *guthi* are not in this sequence.

### ***Gaṇeśa Jātrā guthi, the Association of the Gaṇeśa Procession***

An important Gaṇeśa shrine in Sankhu is located in the Sālkhā quarter; its procession is carried out once every year. The processional statue is made of bronze and is kept with Nati Pradhan and is displayed in its shrine every Saturday. Another bronze statue, which is kept with one of the Baḥsi family, is displayed every Tuesday, but is not carried out during the procession.

The procession of Sālkhā Gaṇeśa takes place every year on the day of Yomari punhi,<sup>40</sup> the full-moon. For the procession there is a *guthi* of four members. It has some land tilled by a tenant who pays rent of four *muri* of paddy each year to its *pāhlā*. Nati Kālsingh Śreṣṭha one of the descendants of the founder of the *guthi*, is taking care of the processional statue, which he keeps at his own house nowadays. The *guthi* has to pay the palanquin carriers while one of the four Baḥsi families supplies *bhajan*, a team of singers with instruments, during the procession. The local people of the Sālkhā quarter also join the procession. Every household in Sankhu offers worship with rice and money and *yomari* to Gaṇeśa during this procession.

### ***Bhagavatī Jātrā guthi, the Association of the Bhagavatī Procession***

The temple of the goddess Bhagavatī is situated near the gate of Bhaudhvākā on the southwestern edge of the town. She is also considered Vārāhī, one of the eight mother goddesses located in the town. Once a year, on the first day of the Māgha month (January), i.e., the day of Ghyocāku Salhu festival, the procession of the Bhagavatī takes place in Sankhu. It is the only festival in Sankhu that is celebrated according to the solar calendar. The goddess Bhagavatī receives worship during all other major festivals, but her procession takes place only on this day. On this day, the processional statue of the goddess is brought out from the Malli Śreṣṭha family's house where it is kept during the year. First she is given a bath in the pond located to the north of the temple, and then she is displayed inside the temple where her fixed stone image is situated.

The processional statue remains in the temple for the whole day until it is carried out in the late afternoon. Every household in Sankhu visits the temple and many also offer sacrifices such as cocks, goats or sheep to her. The Bhagavatī procession *guthi* offers sacrifice of a goat to her.



Plate 19 Guthi members singing devotional songs during the annual procession of the goddess Bhagavatī (January 2000).

During the procession of Bhagavatī, the Ipātol *bhajan* group, Sāymi *dāphā* and *dhā* musicians also join the procession with their music. The goddess is worshipped by each household, which offers rice grains, flowers, incense, *ṭikā* and foodstuffs at every quarter of the town during the procession.

Four carriers are hired by the *guthi* to carry the palanquin. They were each paid 150 rupees in 1997. As I mentioned above, the *guthi* responsible for carrying out the procession of Bhagavatī is the same as the one for the Ipātol Kṛṣṇa procession. It is a thirteen-member Śreṣṭha *guthi* and many of them are shop owners. The income of this *guthi* comes from the rent it receives from the shops located next to the Bhagavatī temple.

### *Mādhav Nārāyaṇa guthi*

The *guthi* of the annual festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, which used to be run by an individual *thekedār*, Dharmadas Syārbā Śreṣṭha till 1991, has been taken over by the Vajrayoginī VDC. He had to abandon his duties, because the Guthi Corporation did not supply him with sufficient money during his tenure. This *guthi* has to fulfill many obligations during the festival including a serpent sacrifice fifteen days after the festival. According to Govinda Dhaubaji Śreṣṭha, the present head of the Vajrayoginī VDC, the

Guthi Corporation began supplying fifty thousand rupees since 1999 to cover all the expenses needed for the festival.

A record dated 1938 AD shows that Dilshankar Śreṣṭha endowed sixty-one *ropanī* of land to run the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi* in 1919 (1976 VS). This document further states that the income of the *guthi* was fifty-eight *ropanī* and ten *ānā* of land with an income of sixty *murī*, five *pāthī*, one *mānā* and five *muthi* unhusked rice in kind and seven rupees, eleven *paisā* two *dām* in cash. Its expenses in kind were nineteen *murī* three *pāthī* four *mānā* and five *muṭhī* rice.<sup>41</sup>

### ***Pyārāmari guthi*, the Association of Rice Pastry**

This is a four-member Śreṣṭha *guthi*, which received its name after the main feast of this *guthi* containing rice pastries called *pyārāmari*. An ancestor of one of its members founded this *guthi*. It has an income of thirty *pāthī* of rice per year from its land cultivated by a tenant. The main task of this *guthi* is to worship the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa at Śālinadī on the first day of the month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in January/February.

A day before the feast, the *pāhlā* of the *guthi* informs the other members of the *guthi* to bring *pūjā* items for the next day's worship. They bring plates with offerings to the *pāhlā*'s home. Only a member of the *pāhlā* family has to carry out ritual act; no other members of the *guthi* need to accompany this person. In the evening after the offering is carried out, the *guthi* members gather at the house of the *pāhlā* where they receive a *ṭikā* and flowers from Mādhav Nārāyaṇa as blessings, and then they share in a festive meal. Although they cannot offer any sacrifices to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, they include meat in their festive meal, for which they buy buffalo meat from the market. They also consume steamed rice pastry, (*pyārāmari*), as the special food of the day. All four members receive about five kilograms of *pyārāmari* each, which they carry to their homes, to be shared with their family members later.

### ***Śrīpaṃcamī guthi*, the Association of Śrīpaṃcamī**

This *guthi* received its name because its feast is observed on the day of Śrīpaṃcamī, the fifth day of the bright half of the Sillā month. This day is dedicated to the Hindu goddess Saraśvatī, the goddess of knowledge. On this day, Mañjuśrī, the Buddhist god of knowledge is also worshipped. However, the Śrīpaṃcamī *guthi* in Sankhu is dedicated to Mahālakṣmī or to Aji dyo, the grandmother goddess, who is also considered to be one of

the eight mother goddesses in Sankhu. Her temple is located in the Calākhu quarter. On this day, the four members of the Śrīpaṃcamī *guthi* worship at Mahālakṣmī. A Buddhist priest or Vajrācārya officiates at the ceremony. At the end of the ritual, this *guthi* distributes festive food (*samaybaji*) to bystanders. It has an income of three *murī* of rice paid by a tenant who cultivates its land.

### ***Bhimsen guthi*, the Associations Related to Bhimsen**

Bhimsen is one of the warrior heroes from the Hindu epic, Mahābhārata. He is the second eldest of the five Pāṇḍava brothers. In the epic Mahābhārata, he was famous as a warrior with extraordinary physical strength. However, in Newar society, Bhimsen is worshipped not as a mighty warrior but as a protective god of trade and business. Newar traders believe that those who can please Bhimsen are bestowed with profit in their business. Therefore, Bhimsen is the most popular god among the Newar trading community.

In Sankhu, there are several Bhimsen *guthi*, most of which do not have any social obligations to fulfill, but only observe an annual worship of Bhimsen and organise a feast. Only one Bhimsen *guthi* carries out the procession of Bhimsen. The patron of this *guthi* was a forefather of the Thakāli Śreṣṭha family, Rajbhai, who also donated a golden statue of Bhimsen for the procession. It is believed that one of the ancestors of this family, who was a great merchant of Sankhu doing business with Tibet, installed the stone statue of Bhimsen at Śālinadī. The story goes like this: prior to the installation of this statue this man was returning from Lhāsā, the capital of Tibet, with several dozen porters carrying wool for him. On his way to Nepal, one of the porters felt that his load became extremely heavy. When his load was checked the Thakāli merchant found a round shaped stone in the middle of the wool bundles. He removed it from the wool and threw it into the river as they were walking along. Later, another porter complained of his heavy weight, and again a stone emerged. Again he cast it away. However, similar incidents occurred to other porters and at last the Thakāli merchant realised that the stone was a divine stone. He believed it to be the god Bhimsen himself, so he decided to carry it home and install it at Śālinadī in its present location where the statue of Bhimsen is still standing. It is believed that underneath the stone image of Bhimsen the divine stone still exists.

In 2000, when I was doing my fieldwork in Sankhu, Gyanamananda Vajrācārya provided me with a manuscript (*MMC-I*), which contains the story of the Bhimsen stone. It tells that this incident took place in 1679



(799 NS) when Harisamkha Bhāro, a trader of Sankhu Sumtol returned home. He threw away the stone he found in one of his porters' cotton sacks. During the same night, he was instructed by god Bhimsen in his dream to carry the stone to Nepal and build a temple for him. As soon as he was back home, he built a temple of Bhimsen, placing the precious stone below the stone image on the bank of the river Śālinadī. It was completed on the seventh of the bright half of Māgha month in the same year. Another note mentions the recovery of this stone when the temple was renovated in 1868 (982 NS). This note also describes the appearance, size and colour of the stone, which was again put back under the temple structure (MMC-I: 23a & 23b).

The same family, who constructed this Bhimsen temple, also donated land for a Bhimsen *guthi* responsible for carrying out the annual procession. At present, the *guthi* has six members, the Thakāli family provides thirty *pāthī* of beaten rice for the *guthi* feast each year. The members of the *guthi* paid other necessary expenses. On Bhima Dvādaśī, a goat is sacrificed for the feast of the *guthi*. A portion of the feast as well as a leg of the sacrificed goat is given as *prasād* to the Thakāli family.

There are other Bhimsen *guthi*, which observe only a yearly ritual and feast. These are thirty-one members Ipātvāḥ Bhindyo *guthi*, a twenty-five member Pukhulāchi Bhimsen *guthi*, a sixteen-member Dugāhiti Bhimsen *guthi*, an eighteen-member Mahādyo dhvākā Bhimdyo *guthi*, a sixteen-member Nāri Bhimdyo *guthi*, a twenty-three member Nāy Bhindyo *guthi*, and a twelve-member Jogi Bhimsen *guthi*. These *guthi* do not have any source of income but their members share the expenses of their annual ritual and feast. Each *guthi* has its separate day to observe the annual feast. Among the above-mentioned *guthi*, the Pukhulāchi Bhimsen *guthi* is the newest one. It was established only in 1976. A twenty-four member Sālkhā Śālinadī Bhimdyo *guthi* is another new *guthi* that was established in 1973. With the consent of the Vajrayoginī VDC, this *guthi* received some land on the hill of Vajrayoginī where a Buddhist monastery belonging to Tibetan refugees is located nowadays. The Tibetans purchased this land from the Sālkhā Śālinadī Bhimsen *guthi* two decades ago to build their monastery. The *guthi* put the money in a bank and the annual feast of this *guthi* is paid by the interest of this money to this day.

### ***Gorakhanāth Jātrā guthi* (the Association of the Gorakhanāth Procession)**

Gorakhnāth is the most respected god of the Jogi caste in Newar society. It is believed that the Jogi in Newar society are the descendants of the Gorakhnāth Yogis.

The shrine of Gorakhanāth in Sankhu is situated at an open space to the east of the courtyard of the Bhimsen shrine in Śālinadī. As Laksmi Narayan Jogi told me, the Gorakhanāth statue originally was at Śālinadī but the people of Dhomlā quarter secretly took it away to install it in their neighbourhood about fifty meters north of the Dhomlā Gate. He remembers that the statue was there until the 1960s. Later, the people of the Dhalamkva sub quarter of the Calākhu quarter secretly reinstalled it at its present location in Śālinadī. He told me that Gorakhanāth is a god of prosperity, and that peasants in particular believe that, if one can please Gorakhanāth, the god, will bestow with plenty of grains on one's fields. So the people of the two quarters in Sankhu each tried to install the Gorakhanāth shrine as close as possible to their own quarter and fields.

Once every year, on the day of Sipunhi, the full-moon day of Sillā month, the procession of Gorakhanāth takes place in Sankhu. His feet represent the shrines of Gorakhanāth. In Sankhu, there is a stone statue of Gorakhanāth at the temple while the processional statue is made of bronze. The present processional statue is dated 1725 AD (845 NS) and written in the Newar language and in the Newar script. When the procession is carried out in town, every household offers worship to Gorakhanāth. The processional statue is kept with one of the members of the Gorakhanāth procession *guthi* during the rest of the year. This *guthi* consists of twelve members and all are Jogi. The Gorakhanāth *guthi* is also the *sī guthi*, the funeral association for the Jogi in Sankhu, so it can be called a caste as well as a multi-purpose *guthi*. In Sankhu, this is an exception, but in Kathmandu there are many examples of this kind, such as the Gathu dancer's *guthi*, the Talāchi Sāymi *guthi* and the Jyāthā Prajāpati *guthi*.

### ***Silācarhe guthi*, the Associations to celebrate the day of Silācarhe**

Silācarhe is the fourteenth day of the dark half of the Sillā month. As people worship the great Hindu god Śiva on this day, it is also known as Mahāśivarātri or the great night of Śiva. On this day, during the night, every household lights a bonfire, worships Śiva and eats various fried beans. Local youth and children gather together and collect wood. During

the day, they go from house to house begging for wood. The youngsters also steal wood or straw from wherever possible. In the night, they burn a fire, either in front of a shrine of Śiva or of Gaṇeśa. They keep burning the fire till late at night. A four-member Śreṣṭha Silācarhe *guthi* performs worship at the Mahādev temple, lights wicks in the evening and distributes fried beans. Similarly, a Bhujimpu Silācarhe *guthi* performs worship in the Dhomlā Mahādev temple and distributes fried beans. In the past many *guthi* of this kind existed but over the years they have disappeared one after the other.

Another important event of the day is a fire sacrifice consisting of two serpents, sparrows, fishes and a goat's head.<sup>42</sup>

### ***Mahādyo pukhucā guthi* (Association of Mahādev Pond)**

Both ponds used during the Gathāmmugaḥ festival used to have a *guthi* for their maintenance. The *guthi* belonging to the Pukhulāchī pond no longer exists, but the one belonging to Mahādyo pukhucā pond does. It is a six-member *guthi* and land for it was endowed by an ancestor of Kathmandu Kvane Thakujuju, the petty king of the southern half of Kathmandu. The members of this *guthi* are all Śreṣṭha of Sankhu. Twice a year, the *guthi* members celebrate feasts. In February, on the day of Silācarhe, they clean up Mahādyo pukhucā pond and worship Mahādev at the Mahādev temple. On this day, after worshipping Mahādev and cleaning the pond, they take festive food. In April, during the seventh day of the Vajrayoginī festival, the *guthi* worships at the Vajrayoginī temple in the morning and feasts in the evening. It has an income of fourteen *murī* of paddy annually. However, since 1975, the *guthi* failed to continue its task of cleaning the pond and maintaining it. The pond remained in a dilapidated condition before it was renovated in 1997. So, the *guthi* is of not much use at the present. Therefore, a local NGO, Friends of Sankhu, took the initiative to restore the pond together with the Mahādev temple and other monuments around the area in 1997/98.

### ***Holi punhi guthi*, the Associations of Holi**

Holi is one of the widely celebrated festivals in Nepal. In Sankhu, the Holi festival begins on the eighth of the bright half of the Cillā month and finishes on the full-moon's day. In Sankhu, the *cir*, a bamboo pole with pieces of multi-coloured cloth attached to its top is erected by the Sālkhā Holi punhi *guthi* adjacent to the Bhimlvāhaṃ shrine in the Sālkhā quarter to begin the festival. Holi punhi *guthi* is an association of twelve Śreṣṭha

of the Sālkhā quarter. Another Holi punhi *guthi* in Sankhu is of the Jogi caste: this *guthi* used to have some land but the tenant stopped paying the rent. At present, this *guthi* receives cash money of about a thousand rupees each year from the Guthi Corporation, which is insufficient to meet the expenses for the feast, as one of the members told me.

### ***Yaḥsim̐ thanegu guthi* (Association of Erecting the Ceremonial Pole)**

The *yaḥsim̐ guthi* in Sankhu is a Śreṣṭha *guthi* composed of four members: two members from two Khānivā households, one Kisi and one Maltā. The person whose turn it is (*pāhlā*) has to prepare all the necessary materials for the worship of Aji dyo, the erection of the ceremonial pole (*yaḥsim̐*) and the yearly feast for the members. Every year it is the turn of one of the members to perform the tasks. On the day of erecting the *yaḥsim̐*, all members also bring a worship tray full of flowers, red and yellow powder, an egg, rice grains and incense to the *pāhlā*'s home to be added to the main worship tray. This *guthi* used to have some land but the tenant who cultivated it has stopped paying any rent to the *guthi* since a decade ago, so the members of the *guthi* share the expenses. Every year, the same *yaḥsim̐* is erected and it is renewed only if it breaks or deteriorates from age. A *yaḥsim̐* can be fifteen or more metres long. When the *yaḥsim̐* is set up, *patāh*, a long cotton festoon painted with colourful *aṣṭamātrkā* figures is attached to it with a rope. During the erection of the pole and at the time of pulling it down the next day, the local people assemble to help. On this occasion, a drum (*dhime*) and a pair of cymbals is played which adds to the festive mood. The erection is usually completed before noon on the last day of the solar Vikram Year and its pulling down is completed in the morning of New Year's Day.

As soon as the pole is erected, a cock sacrifice is performed at the *tvāh* Gaṇeśa. Then, an elaborate worship with a goat sacrifice is carried out at the shrine of the Aji dyo. No priest is employed for the worship, but the *pāhlā* himself does the worship and one of the members kill a cock and a goat at the respective shrines. The *guthi* members also worship the *yaḥsim̐* with rice grains, red and yellow powder, and offer it *samaybaji*, but no blood is sprayed on the pole as it is also considered to be a *nāga*, the divine serpent. They receive red *ṭikā*, black soot prepared from a wick lit in a small earthen bowl at the corner of the Aji dyo shrine, and blood from the sacrificed cock and goat is marked on their foreheads as a blessing. Each of them also receives a piece of red cloth as a garland. After the ritual, they go to the *pāhlā*'s home where they are entertained with

*samaybaji* in the morning, and have a feast (*sikāḥbhvay*) in the evening. For the *sikāḥbhvay*, the head of the sacrificed goat is divided into eight pieces as in other cases. On a seniority basis, right and left eyes, right and left ears are divided among the members, after the feast, the old *pāhlā* hands over the tongue with a portion of the food to the new *pāhlā* who receives his turn for the next year. The head of the sacrificed cock is given to the eldest member of the *guthi*. The family members of the *pāhlā* at whose house the feast is prepared, consume the remaining parts of the goat's head.

### ***Ihi guthi* (the Association for Ceremonial Marriage)**

Compared to other socio-ritual *guthi* in Sankhu, the *ihi guthi* is a relatively new one, and it was established only in 1944. Before it was established, people from Sankhu had to bring their children to other Newar towns like Nālā, Bhaktapur, Kathmandu and Patan for the *ihi* ritual. To overcome the inconvenience faced by Sankhu people, a meeting was held at the Brahmin's home that year. Those who attended the meeting decided to endow land and money to establish the *ihi guthi* and to sustain it. The income from the land was sufficient to carry out the *ihi* ritual for a few hundred girls every year. However, this *guthi* also met a similar fate as other *guthi* did because of the 1964 land reforms programme. Nowadays, it receives only three *murī* of paddy annually which is far below the requirements. Nowadays, there are twelve members in this *guthi*, and each year one of them gets the turn to organise the *ihi*. The members are only the Śreṣṭhas of Sankhu. Depending upon the *pāhlā*, the *guthi* may raise a certain amount of money from the parents of the *ihi* girls to meet the expenditure of the *guthi*.

In 1997, when I observed the ceremony as a participant when my own daughters underwent the ceremony, seventy-eight girls were initiated in the *ihi* ritual. The *guthi pāhlā* raised one hundred and fifty rupees from each of them. The *guthi* members said that this was necessary to meet the expenditure. However, the *pāhlā* alone takes decision to raise money, because the expenditure has to be borne by the *pāhlā* during his term. Not every *pāhlā* raises money from the participants. Another had not raised money at the time of his term because he felt that the ceremony was of a religious merit (*punya*).

### ***Siṃkāko guthi*, the Association of Arranging Wood**

On the ninth day of the bright half of the Bachalā month, all the nine *guthi* had to bring some wood to the cremation ground. The poor families in Sankhu, who could not afford to purchase wood to burn the dead bodies of their relatives, could use this wood. These *guthi* received the name *Siṃkāko* because they had to add wood (*siṃ*) to the cremation grounds every year. They were also known by the name *Kāti guthi*, because they had to worship Kānti Bhairava situated on the cremation ground.

The *Siṃkāku guthi* is also known by the name *Kāti guthi*. In the past, there used to be nine such *guthi*, but nowadays only one exists, i.e., the *Syārbā Śreṣṭha Siṃkāku guthi*. It has some land cultivated by a tenant who pays six *murī* of paddy every year to this *guthi*. This *guthi* has seven members: five from the *Śreṣṭha* caste and two from the *Vajrācārya*. It had one *Nāy*, one *Kisāni* and a *Duiṃ* as members, but recently they have abandoned their membership. They abandoned the *guthi* as they received insufficient income from the *guthi* land. In the past, the *Nāy* caste had to perform funeral music, the *Duiṃ* had to blow trumpets and the *Kisāni* had to perform cremation duties at the cremation ground for all high-caste Newars. They found these duties insulting as it gave them a low status in society. Before they left the *Syārbā Siṃkāku guthi*, this was a unique example of a multi-caste *guthi* that included members from low and unclean castes. During the yearly feasts of this *guthi*, all *guthi* members had to sit on one row including the *Kisāni* and the *Duiṃ*, except for the *Nāy*, who was excluded because he was considered unclean. In the past, the *Śreṣṭha*, who consider themselves to be of high caste, and the *Vajrācārya* or Buddhist priestly caste, did not sit with other low-caste people in one row during a festive meal, except on this occasion.

This *guthi* has to perform worship at Kānti Bhairava, the god of death, at the cremation ground twice a year; once on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the Caulā month and once more on the ninth day of the bright half of the Bachalā month. In the past, on the fourteenth day of the dark half of the Caulā month, all the nine *guthi* used to present plates of offerings (*pūjābhu*) at the cremation ground in order to perform the worship of Kānti Bhairava. They had to perform the ritual together. All the members of these nine *guthi* were considered to be the descendants of the original inhabitants of the town. Each of them also had to offer a sacrifice to Kānti Bhairava: either a goat or a cock. Then, they had to take a festive meal at the cremation ground. Now, when the *Syārbā Siṃkāku guthi* takes a festive meal at the cremation ground it gives a portion of festive food to the *Dyolā*, who is in charge of cleaning the cremation ground that day. As

the chief of the *guthi* explained to me that the lowest caste, or Po, is also considered a member of the *guthi*. However, at the time of taking festive meals the other members never inter-mixed with the Nāy and the Po.

If any outsiders die inside Sankhu, in case of a death of any married-out daughters or their children inside Sankhu too, the Syārbā Simkāku *guthi* has to take charge of the cremation. As the *nāyo*, the chief of the *guthi*, Bishnusankar Syārbā Śreṣṭha remembered, such an incident occurred almost fifty years ago, but he knew of no later instances. This *guthi* possesses several sizes of shrouds, he disclosed. Almost every caste in Sankhu is associated with one or another *sī guthi* responsible for the cremation of its members and their family members.

### ***Digu pūjā guthi*, the Associations to Worship a Lineage Deity**

Worship of *digu dyo*, the lineage deity, is an important ceremony in Newar society. Every individual family may carry out its annual worship of the lineage deity (*digu dyo*) separately. When a large family breaks up, the separated families may still jointly carry out the annual worship. In such a case, a *digu pūjā guthi* emerges to streamline the annual worship, e.g. to take responsibility for arranging an annual worship in turn by each separated family. A *digu pūjā guthi* never accepts anybody as its member other than from its own pedigree, because it is limited to its lineage brothers and cousins. In a way, *digu pūjā guthi* can be called family associations. In Sankhu, there are several *digu pūjā guthi* belonging to different castes. They are called by their nicknames and caste names: Ipātva Mākaḥ *digu pūjā guthi*, Dalli *digu pūjā guthi*, Gvārā *digu pūjā guthi*, Kālsim *digu pūjā guthi*, Tusimnhāy *digu pūjā guthi*, Kārki *digu pūjā guthi*, Besaḥ *digu pūjā guthi*, Hāylā *digu pūjā guthi*, Aiyā *digu pūjā guthi*, Sālkhā Mākaḥ *digu pūjā guthi*, Daṃgu *digu pūjā guthi*, Gorkhālī *digu pūjā guthi*, Gathu *digu pūjā guthi*. The largest of them is the Sālkhā Mākaḥ *digu pūjā guthi* with twenty-one lineage families as its members.

### ***Gathāṃmugaḥ guthi* (Associations Gathāṃmugaḥ Festival)**

Gathāṃmugaḥ Carhe is a festival dedicated to the ghost god. On this day effigies of Gathāṃmugaḥ are made to represent ghosts in every quarter of the town of Sankhu and people drag them away to throw outside the town. These effigies are made voluntarily by the people of the quarter, but in a few cases they are made by a Bhu dyo *guthi*. One of the Bhu dyo in Imlā

quarter is made ready by a three-member *guthi*. This *guthi* has no other function other than to make an effigy of *bhu dyo* for the occasion.

### ***Nāgpaṃcamī guthi* (the Nāgpaṃcamī Association)**

The Nāgpaṃcamī *guthi* is not an association related to any of the divine serpents (*nāga*). The *guthi* received its name solely because its yearly celebration falls on this day. An ancestor of a Joṣī family had provided some land in Sankhu to establish it. It has seven members. Its main function is to worship a Hāthu dyo, a wooden mask of Bhairava. Since no sacrifice is possible on the day of Nāgpaṃcamī, on the following day a cock sacrifice to the Hāthu dyo is performed. In the past, the seven members used to take annual turns to celebrate the *guthi* feast. They had to distribute *samaybaji* and spout rice beer from the mouth of the Hāthu dyo and organise a feast for all the members. As the *guthi*'s income decreased, this tradition has been stopped for twelve years (1986). At present, the *guthi* members take the wooden mask of the Bhairava to their house to perform rituals and sacrifice, and feast only with their family members on the same day every year.

### ***Sā nake guthi*, the Association for Cow Feeding**

This *guthi*'s main task is to feed a cow every year in the afternoon on the day of Gunhiphunī (August) in the Sālkhā quarter. Before the *guthi* starts feeding the cow, a worship is carried out in a Kṛṣṇa temple also known as Rām Jhopaḍī (*rāmjāpuli*), where a stone image of Lord Kṛṣṇa is placed. The worship is carried out in the *bhajan* house. A Brahmin and his assistant Joṣī priest are invited to perform priestly tasks for the ritual, while the *pāhlā* of the *guthi* acts as *yajamāna*. Varieties of food and fruits are offered on the floor surface where a *maṇḍala* is drawn to honour the cow. The cow itself cannot enter the temple but it is worshipped from the western window with red and yellow powders (*ṭikā*), flowers, sweets, fruits, a burning wick and incenses. Then the cow is served a *pāthī* (about three kilograms) of boiled wheat from the same window. It is put on a stone, located on the top of a wall. As soon as the cow eats the wheat local people rush to grab some of the wheat, later to give it to their domesticated animals and birds. People believe that the wheat touched by that holy cow has medicinal qualities for their animals and birds.

The *guthi* hires Nāy and Jogi musicians to play their music on this occasion. The Duim trumpet blowers stopped coming for the occasion a decade ago. Usually, a cow from a Brahmin's house is fed on the occasion,



but the cow may come from anywhere, as the Joṣī priest told me. Both the Brahmin and Joṣī, are given foodstuffs as well as cash of around hundred rupees each. This is a three-member Śreṣṭha *guthi* founded by ancestors of one of the members.

### ***Mahādev jātrā guthi*, the Association for the Mahādev Procession**

The temple of Mahādev is located in a sacred complex situated right outside the northeastern gate of Sankhu. In this complex, many important images and shrines are placed, which are important for religious Hindu people. The two-roofed temple of Mahādev is one of the most important sites for them. Every year on the day of Gunhi punhi, the procession of Mahādev takes place sometime in the afternoon. Previously the procession used to be organised by an association called Mahādev jātrā *guthi* (the Association of the Mahādev Procession), but its members abandoned the *guthi* as soon as it lost its source of income. At present, only one of them, who is believed to be a descendant of the founder of the *guthi*, Mukunda Bhātkhāi Śreṣṭha is taking care of the processional statue. At present, the Vajrayoginī VDC is taking care of the procession by providing financial assistance to hire Jogi and Nāy musicians as well as porters to carry the palanquin around the town. In the year 1997, I saw four palanquin bearers, six Jogi musicians and two Nāy musicians receiving about a hundred rupees each from the VDC; foodstuffs as well as rice of about twelve *pāthī*, received from the offering made by the local people during the procession were also shared among them. A *bhajan* group that regularly meets in Sālkhā quarter *bhajan* house, has taken the initiative to join the procession of Mahādev singing devotional songs voluntarily because they belong to the same quarter from where the procession is carried out.

There used to be an eleven-member *guthi* related to this Mahādev. Its income consisting of the tax levied on houses and stores in the town totalled twenty-five rupees sixty *paisā* while its expenses were twenty-four rupees twenty-seven *paisā*, which included the daily worship of Mahādeva and the fees to the priests.<sup>43</sup>

### ***The Sālkhā and Ipātol Kṛṣṇa jātrā guthi* (the Associations of Lord Kṛṣṇa's Procession)**

There are five small Kṛṣṇa temples in Sankhu, all of them are also known as places where worshipers sing devotional songs (*bhajan*) for the god. All the five temples have a stone image of Kṛṣṇa. Among them, however, only

two have processional statues and both used to be carried outside on the day of Janmāṣṭamī, the birth anniversary of the Lord Kṛṣṇa in August. On the day of the procession, the statues of Kṛṣṇa are placed on a palanquin and carried around town. In 1994, the bronze processional statue of Kṛṣṇa belonging to Sālkhā Kṛṣṇa Yātrā *guthi* was stolen. Therefore, the *guthi* had to stop the procession. However, this *guthi* still observes the yearly worship and distributes sweets as blessing (*prasād*) to people on the day of the procession. It has eleven members and has an income of two *murī* and eight *pāthī* of paddy in a year.

The Kṛṣṇa procession *guthi* belonging to Ipātol quarter continues the procession of Kṛṣṇa to this day. One of the members of the *guthi* keeps the bronze statue of Kṛṣṇa in his house. The Ipātol Kṛṣṇa procession *guthi* used to have a few *ropanī* of land cultivated by a tenant, but the tenant has stopped paying rent to the *guthi*. Consequently, the *guthi* nearly collapsed, but the members found an alternative solution - a piece of open space. At a meeting with the consent of Pukhulāchi VDC, the members decided to build a small shop in an open space next to the Bhagavatī temple outside the southwestern gate of Sankhu. It gave them enough income to run the Kṛṣṇa procession *guthi*. It is a thirteen-member Śreṣṭha *guthi*, also responsible for running the procession of the goddess Bhagavatī in November.

A record dated 1923 (1980 VS) shows that Sālkhā quarter Kṛṣṇa Yātrā *guthi* used to be run by a Brahmin and had one *ropanī* land with an income of one *murī* unhusked rice and it used to spend three *pāthī*, one *mānā* and eight *muṭhī* unhusked rice in kind and sixty-eight rupees 65 *paisā* in cash.<sup>44</sup>

### ***Bhujimpu guthi* (the Associations Endowed by Bhujimpu)**

A man in Sankhu, named Jayśamkar Bhujimpu established several *guthi*. Some of the inscriptions found at the site of the monuments he erected reveal that he lived around 1700 AD. His descendants live in Sankhu and some are still called Bhujimpu. Other descendants are called Kavaṃ and Kārki. Bhujimpu was an extremely rich man. Jayśamkar Bhujimpu earned his wealth from his trans-Himalayan business. In Tibet, as a rich man, he used to ride a horse and wear a crown wherever he went. One day, he planned to visit a government office in Kathmandu, and set out in the same stately manner as he used to do in Lhāsā. The general public, the army men and the police assumed him to be a very important royal personality as they saw him with a crown and riding a horse, so they saluted him. In those days, commoners were not allowed to wear a crown or to ride a

horse. When the news of Bhujimpu's behaviour reached the palace court, it got infuriated. Bhujimpu was immediately arrested and interrogated. The court punished him with a fine of hundred thousand rupees in cash for being guilty of wearing a crown and riding a horse without the permission of the palace. So, he went back home to get the money and paid the fine in tiny quarter penny coins (*dāṃchi*) only, so that hundreds of porters carried the loads. It took some officers days to count the money. The authorities, understanding he was a sincere wealthy person, not only pardoned him but he was also awarded an amount of money equal to his fine. The royal authority believed that the country should respect wealthy persons like Bhujimpu.

On the way back to his home in Sankhu, Bhujimpu thought it inappropriate to carry the money back home. So he decided to spend it on religious activities. As soon as he arrived at the Bhuimāletācā, he started to purchase land with that money. He financed the building of many rest places, stone spouts, and temples in and around Sankhu. To maintain these religious monuments he established many *guthi* and endowed them with land. People believe that his descendants still run some of these *guthi*. These *guthi* are: 1) Sarāvati Phalcā *guthi* (the Association for Sarāvati Rest place), 2) Maṇicūḍa Gaṇeśa *guthi* (Association of Maṇicūḍa Gaṇeśa), 3) Cipākhvāḥ Hāthu dyo *guthi* (Association of Cipākhvāḥ Hāthu dyo), 4) Nāygaḥphalcā *guthi* (Association of Nāygaḥ Rest place), 5) Nhusataḥ *guthi* (Association of the New Rest place), 6) Silācarhe *guthi* (Association of Silācarhe). This man also established many *guthi* to support Cāngu Nārāyaṇa, another historical temple of the Valley situated south of Sankhu.

### ***Sarāvati Phalcā guthi* (the Association for Sarāvati Rest place)**

This is a six-member *guthi*. This *guthi* was established to maintain a rest place situated in the Imlā quarter of Sankhu town. Apart from maintaining the rest place, it distributed a complete meal (i.e. rice, potatoes, lentil, salt, ginger, turmeric powder) to hermits and saints five times a month; on the two Ekādaśī, on Carhe, on Aumṣī, and on Punhi of a lunar month. These days are considered to be the auspicious days to distribute gifts (*dāna*). In September, on the full-moon day of Yaṃlā (Yaṃyā Punhi), the *guthi* members celebrate their annual feast. During the month of Yaṃlā, the members also have to burn wicks at the rest place for eight days; from the bright-half Ekādaśī to the dark half of Cauthi.

To carry out these tasks, Jaysamkar Bhujimpu endowed the *guthi* with one hundred and seventy-two *ropanī* of land. The 1964 land reforms programme did not reduce its income immediately, so it continued the distribution of food. However, since 1987, the *guthi* was compelled to reduce the distribution of food to once a month as a result of its loss of income. In 2000, when I was in Sankhu for fieldwork, I found out that the *guthi* was not distributing foods anymore nor was it taking care of the rest place. The Friends of Sankhu renovated it in 2001.

### ***Maṇicūḍa Gaṇeśa guthi* (the Association of Maṇicūḍa Gaṇeśa)**

This is a four-member *guthi*, with an income of three *muri* of paddy. The members are all Śreṣṭha. Their surnames are Kavaṃ (skeleton) and they claim to be the descendants of Bhujimpu. The *guthi* carries out an annual worship at a Gaṇeśa shrine standing on a ground nearby the Maṇicūḍa pond.<sup>45</sup> In August (Śrāvan), on the full-moon day (*Kvāti punhi*), a goat is sacrificed to Gaṇeśa. In the past, all the members had to go visit on the shrine and spend the whole day eating a meal after the sacrificial ritual. Now, they do no longer continue this tradition. The difficulty consists in the place being far away from their homes. Only the *pāhlā* and his family members are obliged to go on carrying out the ritual and the sacrifice. In 1997, when it was the turn of Madan Kavaṃ, he went there alone with a hired porter to carry the goat and other items for the worship. After the sacrifice, he and his porter took *samaybaji* and cleaned the sacrificed goat. It was only in the evening that he served the feast meal and distributed the head parts of the sacrificed goat to the *guthi* members.

### ***Cipākhvāḥ Hāthu dyo guthi* (the Association of Small-faced Bhairava)**

This is a four-member *guthi* whose duties are to light wick to the god Bhairava spouting beer (Hāthu dyo) from Yamlāthva Dvādaśī to Yamlāgā Caturdaśī during the Yamlā month (August).<sup>46</sup> During these eight days, the *guthi* also distributes *samaybaji* and spout rice beer from the mouth of the Hāthu dyo every evening.

As the story goes, the Bhujimpu family had two Hāthu dyo masks, one was large (Tapākhvāḥ) and the other was small (Cipākhvāḥ). When a conflict arose between two brothers, the younger brother took over the large one (Tapākhvāḥ Hāthu dyo) and the smaller one (Cipākhvāḥ Hāthu

dyo) was handed over to the *guthi*. Therefore, this *guthi* received the name Cīpākhvāḥ Hāthu dyo *guthi*. Its annual income is seven *murī* of paddy.

### ***Nāygaḥ Sataḥ Guthi* (the Association of Nāygaḥ Rest place)**

*Nāygaḥphalcā guthi* has four Śreṣṭha members and has an income of twenty-four *murī* of paddy, yearly. The rest place is situated a few steps west of Pukhulāchī pond. The *guthi* members perform a Śrāddha in the name of Jayśaṃkar Bhujiṃpu and hold a feast once a year on the sixth day of Kārtik Śukla (October). Maintenance of the rest place is also a major task, and, although the rest place fell down a few years ago, the *guthi* has not yet carried out its restoration.

### ***Nhusataḥ guthi* (the Association of the New Rest place)**

This has an annual income of fifty *murī* of paddy and it has four members who share the income of the *guthi*. They perform ritual offering of food to the deceased (*śrāddha*) twice a year, once in the name of Jayśaṃkar on the day of Māgha Kṛṣṇa Ekādaśī and again in the name of his brother Hariśaṃkar on the day of Māgha Kṛṣṇa Dvādaśī (January). On both days the members feast. In April, during the festival of Vajrayoginī, the *guthi* has to clean the Nhusataḥ rest place, burn wicks and organise a feast at the *pāhlā*'s home. During the month of Yaṃyā it burns wicks at the rest place for eight evenings, organise a feast on the full-moon day (Yaṃyā punhi). Besides these obligations, the *pāhlā* family carries out a daily worship in the morning and burn wicks in the evening at the rest place.

### ***Silācarhe guthi* (the Association of Silācarhe)**

*Silācarhe guthi* is again a four-member Śreṣṭha *guthi*. On the dark half of the Sillā month (February), a ritual with a goat sacrifice is carried out at the Gaṇe a shrine situated outside the Dhomlādhvākā gate and the members take a *sīkāḥbhvay* in the evening.

### ***Pañjārām guthi* (the Associations for Giving Alms to Buddhist Priests)**

On Pañjārām or Pañcadāna Carhe, the fourteenth day of the dark half of the Guṃlā month in August, the Pañjārām festival is observed, on the

same day that the procession of Vasundharā takes place. During this day, Buddhist priests visit houses asking for alms. Many individual families as well as the *guthi* offer alms to the Vajrācārya and Śākya at their homes. There are also many families and *guthi* who offer grains and cooked rice as alms to the Buddhist priests, during the procession of Vasundharā. Half-husked rice, salt, ginger, beans and cucumber are the main items given as alms. These foodstuffs are considered to be pure and people believe that the person who gives away these foods as gifts gain much merit.

A five-member Sukhi Pañjārām *guthi*, a three-member Khupā Pañjārām *guthi*, a three-member Syārba Pañjārām *guthi*, a two-member Dhaubaji Pañjārām *guthi* and a four-member Baḥsi Pañjārām *guthi* offer cooked rice as alms. In every quarter there are several families who offer grains as alms to the Buddhist priests upon the arrival of the Vasundharā procession in their respective quarters. Many Pañcadāna *guthi* have disappeared during the past four to five decades. Many of the individual families who distribute alms today, once formed a *guthi* with several members. These families such as the Manācheṃ, Tājācheṃ, Aiyā and Ghorī Śreṣṭha have continued offering alms despite the disintegration of their *guthi*. In the past, several *guthi*, upon the arrival of the procession of Vasundharā had to shower many *murī* of half-husked rice at the Suntol quarter. This was done to show respect to the goddess Vasundharā whose kindness bestowed to the earth the power to grow varieties of grain for the survival of human beings. Today none of the *guthi* responsible for showering grains exists any longer.

A three-member Ghorī Pañcadāna *guthi* was one of the *guthi* having to shower rice at the Suntol quarter. This *guthi* had two Śreṣṭha members and one Vajrācārya member. A day before the Pañcadāna, the *guthi* members used to have a feast at the *pāhlā*'s home and arrange materials for the next day. On the day of Pañcadāna itself, the *pāhlā* had to cook rice and arrange two *murī* of half-unhusked rice to shower at the ceremony. The Dyolā, the sweeper caste in Newar society, collected the rice showered at the ceremony. One of the members who also was the tenant of the land belonging to this *guthi*, stopped paying rent to this *guthi* so the *guthi* had to relinquish its tasks.

### ***Devī pyākhaṃ guthi* (the Association of the Devī Dances)**

Once a year on Kāyāṣṭamī, the eight-day of the bright half of the Yamlā month, the dances of Devī take place in Sankhu. An organisation called Devī *pyākhaṃ guthi* takes care of the organisation of the dances. Although most socio-religious *guthi* are caste-bound in their nature, some are not.

Sankhu's Devī *pyākhām guthi* is one of the *guthi* whose members come from many castes. It has members from the Śreṣṭha, Chipā, Puṃ, Jyāpu and Jogī castes. Previously this *guthi* consisted of nine members from the Śreṣṭha caste alone, as members of other castes participating were not considered *guthi* members; but nowadays the pattern of the *guthi* has changed considerably. Many people of the Calākhū quarter, who come from different castes, are now considered to be members of one *guthi*. Yet, the organising responsibility is taken by the five *nāyo*'s, the leaders of the *guthi*, who all belong to the Śreṣṭha caste. Moreover, during the singing and the playing of instruments, other castes also take responsibilities in the association.

According to the late *khiṃ nāyo*, Shyam Krishna Śreṣṭha, anybody who brings a plate with materials for worshipping Nāsaḥ dyo in the morning of the dance performing day (Kāyāṣṭmī) is considered to be a member of the association. The Jyāpu (or farmer caste) who sing and play instruments, the Jogī who play *mvahāliṃ* (a pipe), the Nau (or the barber) who cut toe nails and shave heads of the dancers, and the Puṃ or Citrakār who paint masks, all bring *pūjā* (a plate with worshipping materials) on that morning. All are considered to be *guthi* members of the Devī *pyākhām*. Generally impure castes like the Jogī are never considered to be members in other *guthi*. In Sankhu, Devī *pyākhām* is one of the rare examples of the suspension of caste distinction.

A record dated 1950 (2007 VS) at the Guthi Corporation shows that the Devī Dances *guthi* had two *ropanī* of land with an annual income of three *murī* of unhusked rice.<sup>47</sup>

### **Yeṃyā *guthi* (the Associations related to Yeṃyā Festival)**

Yeṃyā *guthi* are related to the Yeṃyā festival that is celebrated in the month of September (Yeṃlā). One of the important activities of this festival is to erect Yambā poles. This takes place on the eleventh day of the bright half of the Yeṃyā month. The erection of the Yambā poles is done by individual families and by several *guthi* in Sankhu. These *guthi* are Yambā *guthi*. In the past, many Yambā *guthi* used to erect poles in Sankhu but at present only the Thāru family's association can be called a *guthi* that continues the erection of a Yambā pole every year in Sankhu. It used to have four members but three of its members abandoned the *guthi* as soon as it lost its income three decades ago. Gyan Narayan Thāru, the eldest member of the Thāru family informed me that he was continuing the custom of erecting the Yambā dyo pole because his own forefathers had initiated the *guthi*. Therefore, it is a religious task for him, but he doubted

that his sons would continue after his death. The Ghorī family had three Yambā dyo *guthi*, two of which disappeared almost fifty years ago because of a clash among the *guthi* members. The third *guthi* stopped functioning three decades ago because two other members left it. However, the Ghorī family continued the erection of the Yambā dyo until 1984, when it was stopped because the pole had been stolen from the site where it was erected. The wooden mask of the Yambā dyo was stolen long before the pole itself was stolen. However, the offering of a wick light for nine evenings and the offering of food in the name of the Yambā dyo are still continued every year.<sup>48</sup>

The following are names of the Yambā *guthi* which disappeared in the recent past; Khānivā Yambā *guthi*, Hārāmkhvaḥ Yambā *guthi*, Pikhā Yambā *guthi*, Gvārā Yambā *guthi*, Josī Yambā *guthi*, Daṃgu Yambā *guthi*, Nyāsi Yambā *guthi*, Nāy Yambā *guthi*, Jogi Yambā *guthi*, and Mākāḥ Yambā *guthi*.

Other important activities of the Yaṃlā festival include the worship of the Hāthu dyo, the god Bhairava spouting beer from his mouth. Usually, wooden masks of the god Bhairava are displayed in different quarters of the town and homemade rice beer or another liquor is spouted from his mouth through a pipe during this Yaṃlā festival. In Sankhu, only two such *guthi* are still functioning: a three-member Yaṃyā Hāthu *guthi* spouts beer and distributes *samaybaji* in the Sālkhā quarter on Dvādaśī, the twelfth day of the bright half of the Yaṃlā month. Another is a four-member Yaṃlā Hāthu *guthi*, which spouts beer and distributes *samaybaji* in the Calākhū quarter on the day of full-moon. There are some Yaṃlā *guthi* that have to clean a rest place (*phalcā*), offer wicks and distribute *samaybaji* or *dhaubaji* (beaten rice mixed with yoghurt) on the full-moon day. The Malla Khacarā's Yaṃyā *guthi* offers wicks in the name of deceased ancestors at the Kvācheṃ *sataḥ* of Ipātol quarter and distributes *dhaubaji* to the passers-by of the quarter during the evening of the full-moon. It has an income of four *murī* of rice per year. A four member Dugāhiti Yaṃyā *guthi* has to offer light and distribute *samaybaji* at a rest place situated in the Dugāhiti quarter on the same day. A five members Yaṃyā *guthi* offers wicks and festive food at Phisaḥ *phalcā* in the Dhomlā quarter on the day of the full-moon.

Many Yaṃyā *guthi* responsible for distributing *samaybaji*, spouting beer, or cleaning and offering wicks at certain rest places or for maintaining stone spouts, have disappeared. Sigvāy Hāthu *guthi*, Khānivā Yaṃyā *guthi*, Pikhā Yaṃyā *guthi*, Nyāsi Yaṃyā *guthi*, Tusimnhāy hiti *guthi* are among them.



### ***Śrāddha guthi* (the Associations for Worshipping Ancestors)**

Śrāddha or the offering of food and worship to one's own ancestors is one of the most important duties carried out in Newar society. According to Newar tradition, people must give birth to a son who is eligible to offer *piṇḍa* after their death. One can never achieve heaven without having a son who performs mortuary rites and annual *śrāddha* to his or her name after his or her death. Those who have children are assured of receiving mortuary rites. Those who do not have a son may find an alternative solution. If they possess enough land and endow the land and property, either to their nearest relatives or form a *guthi* consisting of individuals whom they trust to perform their mortuary rites and annual *śrāddha* after their death. Such *guthi* who have the duty to perform *śrāddha* are known as *śrāddha guthi*. In Sankhu there are several *śrāddha guthi* and *sorha śrāddha guthi*. If it is a *sorha śrāddha guthi*, its members perform *śrāddha* during the dark half of the Yaṃlā month.

There are a number of *guthi* related to *śrāddha*: a five-member Śreṣṭha *sorha śrāddha guthi* of Dugāhiti, a four-member Joṣī Padmavir *śrāddha guthi*, a seven-member Śreṣṭha Amāysalām *śrāddha guthi*, a six-member Syārba Śreṣṭha *sorha śrāddha guthi* and a eleven-member Pikhā Śreṣṭha *Sorha śrāddha guthi*. Many of such *śrāddha guthi* have disappeared, including a five-member Maltā *sorha śrāddha guthi*, a three-member Śreṣṭha *śrāddha guthi* of Sālkhā, and a four-member Cāṃḍa *guthi*.

### ***Baḥsi's ghargharānā guthi*, (the Baḥsi households' Associations)**

Baḥsi is the name of a lineage in Sankhu. The nickname of *baḥsi* or peach was given to one of their forefathers who was fond of peaches, and from then onwards Baḥsi became their family nickname. The Baḥsi families in Sankhu claim that their ancestors migrated to Sankhu from Bhaktapur. There are four Baḥsi households in Sankhu and they are all members of these *guthi*. They are responsible for the running of (1) Sakimilā *punhi guthi*, (2) Navadurgā *nakegu guthi*, (3) Pañcadāna *guthi* (4) Mahālakṣmī *guthi*, and (5) Baḥsi Thā *pūjā guthi*. As the four households of the Baḥsi families ran these *guthi* these began to be called Baḥsi household (*ghargharānā*) *guthi*.

Once these *guthi* of Baḥsi families used to have enough sources of income from the land they used to own. Unfortunately, tenants who have stopped paying rent cultivate most of the land belonging to these *guthi*.

Therefore, the *pāhlā* has to bear the expenditure of the *guthi* these days. All five *guthi* are functioning smoothly since the *guthi* members are dedicated to continue the *guthi* by taking the financial burden turn by turn. They arrived at this understanding because only their own lineage cousins are members of the *guthi*. Also because their own forefathers initiated the *guthi*, they want to continue the activities of these *guthi* despite the dwindling income.

### ***Sakimilā punhi guthi***

Each year on the day of Sakimilā punhi, the full-moon day of October/November and on the day of Silācarhe in February, the *pāhlā* family has to worship and burn wicks around the Bhiṃlvaha shrine in the Sālkhā quarter and around the Lvahaṃ dyo in the Dhoṃlā quarter.

### ***Navadurgā nakegu guthi***

Once every year in January the Navadurgā<sup>49</sup> dances of Bhaktapur visit Sankhu for four days. On the second day after their arrival, this *guthi* invites the dancer Kālī at the *pāhlā*'s home and he receives worship and a festive meal.

### ***Pañcadāna guthi***

On the day of Pañcadāna, the *pāhlā* family has to perform a worship of Vasundharā and give alms of *kibhu* (grains) and *dakṣiṇā* (money) to the Vajrācāryas in the Dhoṃlā quarter. In addition, the *pāhlā* family has to invite five Brahmins to its home and give grains and money. Pañcadāna is a ceremony of giving alms to Buddhist priests, but the giving of alms to Brahmins on that day is typical for the Baḥsi families.

### ***Mahālakṣmī guthi***

Every year on the day of Āśvin Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭamī, the *pāhlā* has to organise a fast (*vrata*) of the goddess Mahālakṣmī. Apart from the family members of the *guthi*, other interested neighbours and relatives are also invited to participate in the fast. A Brahmin priest is invited to perform priestly duties on the occasion. For the ceremony the *guthi* has a metal statue of Mahālakṣmī. This is a daylong ceremony, which takes place on the top floor of the *pāhlā*'s house.

***Baḥsi thā pūjā guthi:* See above under the title *Thā pūjā guthi***

***Nāy guthi, the Associations of the Butcher's***

In addition to two *sī guthi*, which are the funeral associations of the Nāy or the butchers, there are a few other *guthi*, which exclusively belong to the Nāy in Sankhu. They are: (1) Chyālā punhi *guthi* (2) Nāy Bhindyo *guthi* (3) Bicāḥ pūjā *guthi* (4) Guṃlā bājaṃ *guthi*, (5) Nāycā *pyākhaṃ guthi* and (6) Lasatā *guthi*.

***Cyālā punhi guthi***

Chyālā punhi is another name of Milā punhi, the first day of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival. In the morning of the Chyālā punhi, *guthi* members of the Nāy caste first carry out a worship with a sacrifice of two cocks at Mahākāla Bhairava in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. Then, they carry out a worship of Bhairava at the *pāhlā*'s home with the sacrifice of a pig and three cocks. Although this *guthi* celebrates its yearly feast on the day of Cyālā punhi, the first day of the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival, it does not have any obligation to worship Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. The Nāy caste, belonging to one of the unclean castes in the Newar community, is excluded from taking part in the festival. This *guthi* used to be one, but it was divided into two as recently as the last decade because of an internal clash among its members. Nowadays, the first one has eight members while the second has five members. Both *guthi* perform similar worships on the same day.

***Nāy Bhindyo guthi:* (See above under the title *Bhindyo guthi*)**

***Bicāḥ pūjā guthi***

The main task of this *guthi* is to carry out the worship at Vajrayoginī on the day of *bicāḥ pūjā*, the day of final worship. This *guthi* has eighteen members.

## ***Guṃlā bājaṃ guthi* (see above *Guṃlā bājaṃ guthi*).**

### ***Nāyā pyākhaṃ guthi***

*Nāyā pyākhaṃ* or the dance of the Nāy is performed in Sankhu, during the week long festival of Gunhi punhi. Because the Nāy performs the dance, it began to be called *Nāyā Pyākhaṃ* or the dance of the Nāy. Almost all Nāy families in Sankhu are included as members of this *guthi*. Each year, on the day of their dance performance, they carry out worship at a Nāsaḥ dyo shrine, the god of dances and music. Depending on the *pāhlā*'s locality, Nāsaḥ dyo can be from one of the three shrines located in three different quarters. If the *pāhlā* of the year is from the Sālkhā quarter the worship takes place in the Dhoṃlā quarter's Nāsaḥ dyo shrine; if the *pāhlā* is from the Pukhulāchi quarter shrine, the worship is carried out in the Pukhulāchi quarter's Nāsaḥ dyo; and if the *pāhlā* is from the Suntol quarter the worship is carried out in the Ipātol quarter's Nāsaḥ dyo shrine. There are four Nāsaḥ dyo shrines in Sankhu, including the one belonging to the Dyolā, the sweepers or guardians of the mother goddess shrines, which is located in the Dyolā sub quarter in the Sālkhā quarter. The Po, however, exclusively worship this Nāsaḥ dyo.

### ***Lasatā guthi***

Lasatā means joy or entertainment, so the *Lasatā guthi* of the Nāy caste celebrates a joyous festival of Holi. On Phālgun Śukla Daśamī this *guthi* worships Bhimsen located at Śālinadī with a cock sacrifice. Then on the day of Holi punhi or on the full-moon day of Holi the *guthi* members gather at the *pāhlā*'s home to celebrate the Holi festival. It is a twenty-three-member *guthi*. The Nāy have no sources of income to finance their *guthi* feasts, so they have to share expenses every time they celebrate an annual feast of their *guthi*.

### ***Taleju guthi* (the Association of Taleju)**

It is believed that the Malla kings from India carried goddess Taleju into the Nepal Valley in the medieval period (14th to 18th century). Therefore she is considered to be the guardian goddess of the Malla kings. The Malla kings made her temples adjacent of their palaces. Evidently, small towns like Sankhu were never fully sovereign kingdoms but they still kept the presence of a Taleju temples and royal palaces, which clearly indicate royal status.

The annual feeding of the Kumāri, the throwing of food for the ghosts, the Taleju worship and sacrifices during the Dasain festival and the procession of swords (*pāyāḥ*) are the sole responsibilities of the Pukhulāchī VDC. Since these duties are related to the Taleju temple in Sankhu it is also known by the name Taleju *guthi*. Panyāju, a Śreṣṭha family is responsible for organise necessary worship related to Taleju and Joṣṭī, an astrologer-cum-priest is responsible for carrying out worship. Kvābhāri and Chembhāri assist the Pañyaju in organising matters of all worship. In the past, *thekedār* Dharmadas Syārba Śreṣṭha used to handle all activities of worship related to the Taleju temple, but now the Pukhulāchī VDC has taken over all the tasks. This VDC receives sums from the Guthi Corporation for these duties. Then head of the VDC, Mankaji Manandhar, told me that he managed to obtain 13,000 rupees (\$ 186) for the Taleju *guthi* in 1996. Before that, he had been trying continuously to obtain more money from the Guthi Corporation because inflation has been growing each year. Since 1995, according to a decision taken by the government, each VDC receives a budget of five hundred thousand rupees a year, which they can use at its own discretion. As Mankaji Manandhar said, the VDCs are now in a position to spend money to promote local culture and traditions.

### ***Busārām guthi* (the Associations of Anniversaries)**

*Busārām*, *busādam* or *busādhana* is a day of celebrating anniversaries of any man-made monuments like temples, rest places, waterspouts, images of gods and goddesses.<sup>50</sup> Usually, when somebody installs a temple, an image of a god or goddess, or builds a rest place or a waterspout, he also endows a *guthi* with land so that it can celebrate its anniversary. *Guthi* that are made to observe anniversaries of such monuments are known as *Busārām* or *Busādhām*. It appeared from the study of the inscriptions that some *busārām guthi* in Sankhu are older than four hundred years. However, most of the *busārām guthi* mentioned in these inscriptions do not exist anymore. The Malli *busārām guthi*, Bhātkhāi *busārām guthi* are among those still carrying out their duties.

The Malli *busārām guthi* was established by the forefathers of the Malli (Śreṣṭha) family that installed the statue of Rādhā Kṛṣṇa at the temple site of the Mahādev temple. The Malli *busārām guthi* carries out the anniversary of the image once a year on the day of Yomari punhi. On this day, in front of the statue, a small fire sacrifice is carried out with the oblation of different grains into the fire. A Newar Brahmin priest presides over this fire sacrifice.

The Bhātkhāi *busārām guthi* has three members. It celebrates four days after the completion of the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival at Śālinadī, where the Aśvamedha Yajña takes place on the last day of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival. The main function of this *guthi* is to clean up the Aśvamedha Yajña site and worship the statue of a Nārāyaṇa located at that place. The *guthi* has an income of three *murī* of rice.



Plate 20 A Brahmin priest is performing rituals at the side of Mahādev temple (December 1997).

There are also many families who observe the *busārām* of certain rest places and deities in town. The Ghorī family celebrates *busārām* of Iṃlā Gaṇeśa, located in the Iṃlā quarter on the day of Sipunhi. On this day, a cock is sacrificed to the Gaṇeśa statue and *samaybaji* is distributed. The Manācheṃ family celebrates *busārām* of a rest place located at Galay about five hundred meters east of the town. Similarly, a Tulādhar caste family from Kathmandu observes the *busārām* of a rest place located in the Dugāhiti quarter every year in November. To worship certain deities and distribute *yomari* and *samaybaji* during the day of *busārām* is very common.

### ***Bhajan guthi* (the Association of Singing Devotional Songs)**

In Sankhu in every quarter except in Imlā, there exists a place for singing devotional songs, *bhajanchem* or *bhajanghar*. Usually *bhajan* or the singing of devotional songs at such places is done every evening by a group of religious people from that quarter. There are nine *bhajan* places in Sankhu, but presently only at three places is *bhajan* performed all year round every evening, while at other places *bhajan* is performed only during special occasions like *caturmās* or during the four months of Lord Viṣṇu's sleep, *manamās* or during the extra lunar month, which occurs after every twenty-seven months and *navarātri* or the nine nights dedicated to the goddess Durgā. The religious people gather spontaneously at such places every evening to sing devotional songs. Only in the Dhomlā quarter, a *guthi* for *bhajan* exists. The Dhomlā *bhajan guthi* used to have only five Śreṣṭha members, which made it difficult to continue the *bhajan* tradition. Therefore, they reorganised this *guthi* by adding more local people from the Dhomlā quarter in 1995. Nowadays, this *guthi* consists of twelve Śreṣṭha members. Every year on the day of Sakimilā punhi (November), this *guthi* celebrates its annual feast by offering a sacrificial worship to Dhomlā Nāsaḥ dyo.

### ***Obsolete guthi***

As already mentioned above, several *guthi* in Sankhu have disappeared in the course of time. Some of them I have mentioned above in the context of introducing the existing *guthi*. Below, I present a list of some other disappeared *guthi* for which I was unable to record their precise functions and duties in detail:

#### ***Aṣṭamī guthi***

It was an association dedicated to observe a fast on the eighth of the bright half of every lunar month. It belonged to Vajrācāryas in Sankhu.

#### ***Sālkhā Sataḥ guthi***

This association was related to a rest place in the Sālkhā quarter, which had to feed Jogis of other places who visited Sankhu during the festival of Vajrayoginī. A *guthi* record, dated 1937 (1994 VS) shows that king Amrit Malla Dev established it and it had 67 *ropanī*, ten *ānā*, one *paisā* of land.<sup>51</sup>

### ***Cāṃgu guthi***

This *guthi* worshiped the god Cāṃgu Nārāyaṇa annually. The same Bhujiṃpu who established several other *guthi* in Sankhu, had established this *guthi*, but its members abandoned the *guthi* when it lost its income.

### ***Āgaṃ guthi***

This is a *guthi*, which had to worship a lineage deity during the festival of Sithinakhaḥ. Its members were the Jośīs in Sankhu. Internal disputes among its members caused the *guthi* to vanish.

### ***Daśaharā guthi***

This *guthi* was related to a minor festival celebrated in June. It had six Śreṣṭha members but disappeared as a result of the loss of income it had from the land belonging to this *guthi*.

### ***Desa pūjā guthi***

*Desa pūjā guthi* had to worship deities around the town and organise a feast once a year. Its four members were Śreṣṭha who abandoned the *guthi* as the tenant tilling the land belonging to this *guthi* stopped paying rent.

### ***Aji dyo pūjā guthi***

This was a *guthi* that worshipped the Aji dyo in Calākhu quarter. A Śreṣṭha family in Calākhu quarter had endowed it with some land. As the *guthi* members are left without income from the land, they abandoned their worship.

### ***Pāhāṃcarhe guthi***

This was a Śreṣṭha's *guthi*, which organised worship at the shrine of Mahākāla Bhairava on the day of Pāhāṃcarhe.

### ***Yomari punhi guthi***

This was a Śreṣṭha *guthi* that used to celebrate its annual feast after the worship of the local Gaṇeśa in the Suntol quarter.



### ***Hāleyo Lākhe guthi***

This *guthi* belonged to Hāleyo Śreṣṭha's family in Sankhu, which performed a dance of Lākhe during the Gunhi punhi festival. It was abandoned two decades ago. It did not have any land but the Hāleyo Śreṣṭha family used to sponsor the yearly performance of a *lākhe* dance during the festival of Gunhi punhi. The tradition was abandoned only during the last decade.

### ***Nhāykāmsataḥ guthi***

This *guthi* is related to a rest place at the Calākhu quarter called Nhāykāmsataḥ. It had eighteen *ropanī* of land and had a duty to worship Vajrayoginī daily and maintain the Nhāykāmsataḥ rest place. It used to celebrate its annual feast on the month of Bhādra every year.

### ***Anantaligeśvar Mahaādev guthi***

This association was related to Mahādev temple at the Pukhulāchī quarter. It stopped functioning several decades ago, and nobody in Sankhu remembers about its existence. A document at the Regmi Research Collections has its record.<sup>52</sup>

## **Conclusion**

The aim in this Chapter was to give an overall view of the Newar *guthi* system in Sankhu. After a general introduction of the *guthi* system, I have presented the function and duties of each *guthi*. It becomes clear that from the above discussion that almost all religious activities: the celebration of feasts and festivals, the worshipping of gods and goddesses, the organisation of processions of various deities, the building and maintenance of rest places and spouts, the organising of musicians for various religious activities, and the singing of devotional songs are associated with the *guthi*.

No less than twenty *guthi* are involved in the single festival of Vajrayoginī. The festival of Vajrayoginī is the most important one for the Sankhu people. Thirteen other *guthi* carry out various religious activities at the temple of Vajrayoginī on different other occasions. Many *guthi* related to the goddess Vajrayoginī and her festival have disappeared in the course of time. I have recorded duties and functions of a few of such *guthi*, but for many I was unable to gather relevant information. It has become clear

from our discussion that all these *guthi* were meant to systematise ritual activities related to Vajrayoginī at various levels. From the offering of flowers to the daily worship of the goddess (*nitya pūjā*), all aspects were covered through one or the other *guthi*.

The largest area of land is reserved in the name of the goddess Vajrayoginī. The donors were not only the royal authorities but also people from different places. The vast area of land endowed to Vajrayoginī was not only limited to the area around Sankhu but also as far away as Bālāju and Buddhanīlakanṭha to the north of Kathmandu. It can be said without doubt that if these *guthi* could have maintained or retained the lands assigned to Vajrayoginī and its sanctuary, they would have continued to carry out all the ritual activities, maintenance of all temples and monuments in the sanctuary easily. There is no new record to be found in the recent past, which would show the establishment of any new *guthi* with land in the name of Vajrayoginī.

After the Vajrayoginī-related *guthi*, I have listed sixty-five other *guthi* that are connected to various socio-religious activities in the town. These *guthi*'s tasks range from worshipping a deity to organising processions of various deities. In many instances, *guthi* merely observe the annual feasts without performing any social duties, while some carry out their duties in very minimal ways. In a few cases, the government Guthi Corporation is providing the necessary expenditures to run such *guthi*, while in other cases local VDCs also appeared to take responsibility for the continuation of religious activities. In several cases, despite financial constraints, descendants of founders of the *guthi* appeared to take care of *guthi* activities on a minimal scale. However, many *guthi* have vanished without leaving somebody to assume his or her duties or to find an alternative.

These *guthi* were also capable in assigning specific duty to specific persons: from priests to sweepers, from artisans to musicians, and rewarding them according to their duties. Most *guthi* in Sankhu appeared to be run either by one-caste or by multi-caste associations. The largest group in town, the Śreṣṭha, appeared to be dominant in handling these *guthi*. For variety of reasons, *guthi* members have disbanded their *guthi*. The most prevalent reasons for disbanding the *guthi* appeared to be financial constraints caused by the loss of the income from land. The 1964 land reforms programme empowered tenants with rights to pay little or no rent to landowners. This change in particular proved to be disastrous to the *guthi*, because rent from land used to be the single important source to run these institutions. I have listed and mentioned many vanished *guthi* in Sankhu. There are also many cases in which tenants are continuing paying

rents to *guthi* members. In certain cases tenants are also *guthi* members. In such cases the 1964 land reforms did not cause too much damage.

The rituals and religious activities of Newar society all rely heavily on the *guthi*. Even individuals or VDCs appeared to take the burden of carrying out the activities of various discarded *guthi*. Political reasons also compelled the VDC leaders to take over *guthi* tasks. By doing so, they seek public support to be elected as VDC members. As it is now, Newar society is determined to maintain and preserve their cultural significance by continuing ritual activities through *guthi*. However, today neither government authorities nor individuals appear to establish new *guthi* anymore, apart from a few exceptions like Bhimsen *guthi*. Most recently, non-governmental organisations like Friends of Sankhu (FoS) are in a way taking over *guthi* tasks. FoS has completed the restoration of the Mahādev temple and other religious monuments surrounding the temple in 1998. In 1999 the FoS has also completed the restoration of the Vajrayoginī temple, the most important religious monument of Sankhu. For both the works, it received major financial assistance from the Netherlands Embassy and Vereniging Nederland-Nepal (VNN). The FoS also restored two traditional shelters in the Imḷā quarter in 2001 and 2002.

In spite of such enthusiastic acts, Newar cultural traditions are increasingly menaced. Together with financial constraints, the growing impassivity towards the traditions from the side of the young generation is obvious. This forms another challenge to the socio-ritual activities of the Newar society. The half-hearted acts by the government Guthi Corporation also compels people to give up their religious activities. Although the Guthi Corporation supports socio-religious activities, it does not provide sufficient means to carry out the *guthi* duties. Not only the religious and ritual activities are facing such challenges, but also religiously important temples, monuments, rest places and waterspouts are facing similar fate. With the loss of *guthi* the maintenance of such important monuments, many of which already are in dilapidated conditions, has become increasingly difficult. In the past, *guthi* were rich and capable institutions with lavish endowments at their disposal, but this situation has deteriorated. Socio-religious activities, which are the most important functions of *guthi*, have become a burden for them because of the low income or no income situation after the implementation of the 1964 land reforms programme. In spite of the loss of several *guthi*, with respect to great events such as the processions and the festivals of Vajrayoginī or the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, the situation is not yet disastrous. But for small events like the procession of Gaṇeśa or Mahādev, they are facing uncertainties year after year. Financial constraints and internal quarrels

among the *guthi* members are the reasons for the decline and disappearance of certain *guthi*. The third reason, perhaps, is that some *guthi* no longer serve to regulate the ritual and religious life of the community. People have lost interest and commitment because such *guthi* have become more of a personal financial burden due to loss of *guthi* land and property.

Among the youngsters, the traditional *guthi* system is becoming less and less attractive, while modern volunteer organisations such as youth sports clubs, cultural associations, health services and drug control associations, quarter improvement societies, religious associations and literary organisations are gaining in popularity. I was able to record 35 associations of this kind in Sankhu during my fieldwork in 2000. However, it is difficult to say whether these new organisations will be able to replace the traditional *guthi* in the near future. Even though traditional *guthi* may face difficulties, they will continue to maintain their socio-religious characteristics for years to come. As we discussed above, the root of these *guthi* are based on religious beliefs. For this reason, the members of these *guthi* feel obliged to continue their duties. But if goodwill and cooperation are not developed among its various castes, the present crisis may deepen further.

It is remarkable that at a time when newborn NGOs are mushrooming throughout the country the Valley's age-old system of ritualised activities threatens into decline, although, recently, many people have begun to see these *guthi* as alternatives for development with regard to the urban environment and its cultural heritage. However, as stated above, the present government is not considering the use of the existing *guthi* structure as an instrument of development and maintenance of the city. The Guthi Corporation is not able to use the *guthi* structure for any other purposes than supporting ritual activities and this too in an inefficient manner increasingly.

It may be concluded that *guthi* are a social force of integration as they make people from different families/castes/localities cooperate for various reasons and quite frequently. The disappearance of *guthi* surely will diminish contacts between people and thus weaken or led to more individualise life styles at the expense of social community life.

The importance of *guthis*' duties has been discussed in this Chapter. The following Chapter further discusses their relevance in connection with festivals and processions of gods and goddesses in Sankhu.

# CHAPTER TEN

## RITUAL CYCLE: FEASTS AND FESTIVALS

### Introduction

In the preceding chapter we discussed the socio-religious *guthi* that are responsible for carrying out various feasts and festivals in Sankhu. This chapter presents a brief account of all the feasts and fasts, festivals and processions of gods and goddesses celebrated in Sankhu. In the Newar language the words that are used to denote festival, procession, fast, and feast are *nakhaḥ cakhaḥ*, *jātrā*, *vrata* and *bhvay* respectively.

The Valley of Nepal is not only a land of gods and goddesses with numerous temples and idols, but also a land of numerous ritual activities. Pradhan (1986) divided Newar ritual activities into two major categories namely, domestic and cosmic. All the lifecycle rituals including mortuary rites, he considered as domestic rituals while all other calendrical rituals celebrated as fasts, feasts, and pilgrimages and processions of gods as cosmic rituals. In this chapter, it is my intention to explain the rituals popularly known as *nakhaḥ cakhaḥ* among the Newars, which fall into the latter category.

Almost each lunar month in Nepal contains one or another festival (*nakhaḥ cakhaḥ*). Throughout the year, numerous festivals are celebrated, processions of deities are taken out and worship is performed.<sup>1</sup> In the town of Sankhu all major and minor feasts and festivals of the Kathmandu Valley are celebrated. Although the celebration of these feasts and festivals are in many ways similar, in each place they are celebrated with their own local flavour. Moreover, there are also many feasts and processions of gods and goddesses in each place, which has origins in that place. The procession of Vajrayoginī and the month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa belong particularly to Sankhu. Also the processions of Bhimsen, Vasundharā, Bhagavatī and Gorakhanātha can be considered local to Sankhu.

Most feasts and festivals, rituals and traditions celebrated in the Valley date back to ancient times. Analysing some names of festivals found in the *Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī*, the oldest chronicle of Nepal and an inscription dated 1441 AD (NS 561), Sharma stresses that Newar festivals had their present forms already around the reigns of Jayasthiti Malla (1382-95 AD) and Yaksay Malla (1428-1482 AD).<sup>2</sup> When we look at the nature of the celebrations of these festivals, we can see the important influence of the agricultural-cycle.<sup>3</sup> In a way, it can be said that the social life of the inhabitants of the Valley is still to a great measure determined by the agricultural cycle. Till today, many feasts and festivals and processions of gods and goddesses are in one way or the other related to agriculture. However, it would be wrong to conclude that only the agricultural cycle regulates the ritual calendar of the Valley, because there are many festivals that are not connected to agriculture, such as the festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa.

The chain of ritual celebrations in Nepal is cyclical. Although the festival of Vajrayoginī is the most important festival of the town of Sankhu, and may be seen as the beginning of the ritual cycle in Sankhu, most Newars in the Valley consider that the ritual year begins on the day of Gathāmmugaḥ in August. This is the day when the town expels ghosts. Most Newar consider ritual year ends on the day of Sithinakhaḥ in June, the day of worshipping lineage deities. When we look at the celebrating of the festival of Mohanī (*Dasain* in Khas-Nepālī, *Daśaharā* or *Daśerā* in Hindī), the celebration of the divine victory over the demons held in September, which coincides with the rice harvest, one is inclined to consider this to be the most important festival. Those who associate rituals with agriculture consider this festival to be the beginning of the ritual cycle because the main crop, rice, is harvested around this festival. Svanti, which falls two weeks after Mohanī, is another national festival. It is held at the time of the beginning of the lunar eras that are known as the Kārtikādi eras as they change in the month of Kārtik (Oct./Nov.), which includes the New Year's Day of Nepal Saṃvat. Many, therefore, take this festival of Svanti or Tihār as the beginning of the ritual cycle. The New Year's Day of the Nepal era falls on the fourth day of this festival, which is based on the lunar calendar. Since Nepalese people celebrate almost all their festivals according to the lunar calendar, the change of the Nepal era is an important day. Historians believe that the tradition of celebrating New Year's Day and Mha pūjā is much older in Nepal than the Nepal Saṃvat New Year (Shrestha 1982). Many people consider this occasion as the beginning of a ritual cycle in the country. *Nepālvarṣa Kriyā Nakhaḥcakhah Pustakam* (a manual of Nepalese Festivals-NKNP) takes the festival of Svanti as the beginning of the ritual cycle in Nepal.<sup>4</sup>

Haribodhinī Ekādaśī, the eleventh day of the bright half of Kachalā Śukla (November) marks the end of the Caturmāsa or the four-month-long sleep of the Hindu god Viṣṇu. The Caturmāsa is considered to be an inauspicious time of the year, and rituals related to the lifecycle are avoided during this time of the year. Many people in Nepal also consider the end of Caturmāsa to be the beginning of the ritual cycle. However, in Bhaktapur, Bore, Thimi and in Tokhā people celebrate their important festivals during the change of the Vikram era, based on a solar calendar (Gutschow 1996:285-302 and Vergati 1995:184 and 1996). Because of these festivals, many people believe that the ritual cycle begins on the New Year's Day of the Vikram year.

Seasons are one of most important factors in determining festivals. Nepal observes six seasons; Vasanta (spring-Sillā-Cillā), Griṣma (summer-Caulā-Bachalā), Varṣā (rain Tachalā-Dillā), Śarad (autumn Guṃlā-Yaṃlā), Hemanta (winter Kaulā-Kachalā), and Śiśir (frosty Thiṃlā-Pohelā). Each season occupies a two-month time span. In Sankhu, the Jogi caste used to play seasonal music to inform people about the shift of each season, but have abandoned this custom since 1996.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, the devotional songs at the places of devotional singing (*bhajan*) in Sankhu change according to the change of season. People consider Vasanta to mark the renewal of seasons because it is considered to be the “King of seasons.” However, Newar people consider festivals like Gathāṃmugah to be the beginning of the ritual, which falls in autumn.

It may be clear that there is no common opinion about the beginning or the end of the ritual year in Nepal. Any of the aforementioned festivals or ceremonies may be considered as commencing the ritual-cycle in the Valley. However, the manual of Nepalese festival, *Nepālvarṣa Kriyā Nakhaḥcakhah Pustakaṃ* (NKNP) sees the festival of Svanti to be the beginning of the ritual-cycle in Nepal. Conveniently, I also take Svanti or the change of the Nepal era (October/November) as the beginning point of the ritual cycle in Sankhu, because it is one of the most ancient traditions in South Asia and Nepal.

In this chapter, I will describe the festivals, which are celebrated in Sankhu. However, I will also give ample attention to all other festivals that are celebrated both in Sankhu and in other parts of the Valley. In fact, it is difficult to distinguish between particular festivals celebrated in Sankhu as separate from those practiced in other parts of the Valley. Most festivals that I discuss in this chapter are celebrated not only in Sankhu, but also in the other Newar settlements of the Valley.

Svanti is one of the most important autumn festivals. It begins around the change of the ritual year two weeks after Mohanī, the biggest Hindu

festival of Nepal. It is celebrated with great fanfare throughout the country. Then comes Sakimilā punhi, the worship of the full-moon and the consummation of several varieties of fried beans. The festivals that are celebrated in autumn end with Bālācarhe; on this day grains are scattered in the name of recently deceased relatives.

The winter festivals begin with Yomarhi punhi (celebrated with special rice cakes and a procession of Gaṇeśa in Sankhu), and are followed by Ghyocāku Saṃlhu (celebrated with molasses, purified butter (ghee) and yam) and the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa or Svasthānī festival. The worship of Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge, on the day of Śrīpañcamī, the fifth day of the bright half of Sillā, marks the end of the winter festivals and the beginning of spring in Nepal. The processions of Bhimsen, Gorakhanāth, the nightlong worship of Śiva, Silācarhe and the sacrifice of the snake to the fire follow it. Then Holi, the festival of colours and Pāhāncarhe, the worship of a hidden Śiva (Lukumahā dyo) are celebrated. At the closure of the spring festivals, the procession of Vajrayoginī, Māmyākhvāḥ svayegu, in which one's mother is honoured and *Ihi*, the ceremonial marriage of Newar girls to Lord Viṣṇu are celebrated.

Sithi nakhaḥ (the worship of the lineage divinities), Bhalabhala aṣṭamī, Hariśayaṇī ekādaśī (the transplanting of *tulasī* plants) and Gathāṃmugah (the expulsion of evil spirits) are the festivals connected with rice transplantation or the summer season. Then the month-long visits of Guṃlā bājam to Vajrayoginī and other Buddhist monasteries start at the beginning of the festivals related to the rainy season. Nāgapañcamī (the worship of sacred serpents), Mahādev jātrā (the procession of Lord Śiva), Sāpāru (the procession of cows to conduct recently deceased people to heaven), and the procession of Vasundharā, Pañjārāṃ the ceremonial giving of alms to Buddhist priests and Bauyākhvāḥ svayegu (the honouring of one's father) follow them. Cathā (the worship of the waxing moon), Kāyāṣṭamī, the date of the yearly performances of the Sankhu Devī dance (Shrestha 1995a, 1996), Yaṃlāpuhni (the festival of Indra) and Sorha Śrāddha (the sixteen days dedicated to feed the deceased souls) are other festivals related to the rainy season. The autumn festivals begin with Mohanī: the celebration of the divine victory over the demons.

Table 18 presents a list of the festivals celebrated by the Newars. This list does not include all the Newar rituals because some of them are not considered important in Sankhu. However, it may be worth mentioning here the two-day pilgrimages to Vāgdvār-Viṣṇudvār-Tokhā (Sapantīrtha) and the river Cupiṃghāt in Bhaktapur on the last day of Caitra and the first day of Vaisākha months, Bhalabhala Aṣṭamī (Tachalāgā 8), the last day to visit Bhaktapur to worship Navadurgā before their masks are cremated,



Daśaharā (Tachalā 10), the day to take holy bath in rivers and the day to begin eating the new arum lily (*caladium arumacia*) leaves (*phakaṃ*). Only a section of the people in Sankhu is interested and participates in these rituals. Similarly, the Svāmyāpunhi, or the anniversary of the birth of Lord Buddha, is not celebrated in Sankhu, whereas in Kathmandu, Patan, Bhaktapur and other places it is celebrated magnificently.

**Table 18 Newar feasts and festivals**

No	Name of the festivals and major activities	Month/Days	Remarks
1	Svanti, the renewal of the ritual cycle (see Chapter 11) -Kva pūjā (first day): worship of crows, messengers (of Death) -Khicā pūjā (second day): worship of dogs -Sā pūjā and Lakṣmī pūjā (third day): the worship of cows and Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth -Mha pūjā (fourth day): the worship of the self, start of the Nepalese New Year -Kijā pūjā (fifth day): the worship of brothers by their sisters	(Oct./Nov.)  Kaulāgā 13  Kaulāgā 14 Kaulāgā 15  Kachalāthva-1 Kachalā 2	Major festival celebrated at family and the public level. Nepalese people observed it with worship and feasts
2	End of the Caturmāsa, Lord Viṣṇu's awakening i. Jugādi navamī: day of pilgrimage to Sakva Cāngu ii. Haribodhinī ekādaśī: the awakening of Viṣṇu iii. Sakimilā punhi: full-moon day of boiling roots of the <i>arum lily</i> ( <i>caladium arumacia</i> )	(November)  Kachalāthva 9 Kachalā 11  Kachalā 15	Minor festival, observed with pilgrimages and fasts
3	Bālācarhe: the day of throwing grains in the name of recently deceased people	(November) Kachalāgā 14	Visit religious sites
4	Yomari punhi, celebrating the Harvest, procession of Gaṇeśa	(December) Thiṃlāthva 15	Observed with special food
5	Ghyocākusalhu, eating of molasses and ghee, procession of Bhagavatī (Durgā)	(Dec./Jan.) Pohelā Māgh 1	Observed with special food
6	Gathu Pyākham, the annual visit of Navadurgā dancers from Bhaktapur to Sankhu	(Dec./Jan.) Thiṃlāgā 3-6	Minor event
7	The month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Festival ( <i>dhalaṃdanegu</i> ) and the legend Svasthānī Observed with fast, procession & pilgrimages (see Chapter 12)	(Jan./Feb.) Thiṃlāthva 15 to Sillāgā 14	The second most important festival in Sankhu.
8	Śrīpaṃcamī the beginning of spring and the worship of Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge.	(January) Sillāthva 5	Worship and fasts

9	Bhima ekādaśī, the day of Bhimsen and the procession of Bhimsen in the town	(January) Sillāthva 11 and 12	Fasts, ritual and procession
10	Silācarhe, fourteen days after the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Festival. -Nightlong reunion of the participants in front of the Mahādev temple. Burning of wood in town. Serpent sacrifice at the shrine at Sādhukolām, Sankhu.	(February) Sillāgā 14	Fire sacrifice
11	Holi punhi, the festival of colour	Feb./March Cillāthva 8-15	Minor festival in Sankhu
12	Pāhāmcārhe, worship of Lukumahā dyo, the hidden Śiva, <i>sī guthi</i> feasts	(March) Cillāgā 14	Minor festival in Sankhu
13	Caitra Dasain, sacrifices of animals at Mahākāla Bhairava and Rām navamī worship of Rāma	(Mar./April) Caulāthva 8 Caulāthva 9	Minor festival in Sankhu
14	The festival of Vajrayoginī, the most important festival in Sankhu (see Chapter 14)	(Mar./April) Caulāthva 8- Caulāgā 12	Major in Sankhu
15	Yasiṃ thane, the erection of Yasiṃ pole in front of Aji dyo in the Calākhu quarter	Caulā (Mar./April) Vaisākha 1	Minor event in the town
16	Māmyā khvāḥ svayegu, honouring one's mother	(April) Caulāgā 30	Major festival
17	Akṣaya Tritīyā, ceremonial marriage ( <i>ihī</i> ) for the Newar girls of Sankhu	(April) Bachalāthva 3	Local ritual in the town
18	Sithinakhah, worship of the lineage divinity, cleaning of the wells, start of the rice transplantation	(June) Tachalāthva 6	Important
19	Hariṣayanī Ekādaśī, the beginning of Caturmās, Lord Viṣṇu's sleep and -Tulasī piye, the plantation of <i>tulasī</i> plant in the following day	(July) Dillāthva 11 Dillāthva 12	Fast and worship
20	Gurupunhi, the full-moon day dedicated to teachers	(July) Dillāthva 15	Minor festival
21	Analā, the extra month dedicated to the god Viṣṇu and a month-long fair at Macchegaon dedicated to Viṣṇu	Once every two years	Pilgrimage, fasts, story telling,
22	Gathāmmugaḥ Sinājyā byamke, house purification from the pollution of the rice transplantation. Expulsion of the <i>bhū dyo</i> "ghost gods" from every quarter of the town; holy bath in the Pukhulāchi pond. Worship and sacrifice to Viśvakarmā, god of craftsmanship	July/August Dillāgā 14	Major Newar festival
23	Guṃlā, the Sacred Monsoon Month for Buddhists	(July-Aug) Guṃlā.	Buddhist festival
24	Nāgpaṃcamī, worship of the sacred serpents attaching a picture above the main entrance of houses	(Aug.) Guṃlāthva 5	Minor Worship



33	Mohanī (Dasain) the festival of Divine Victory -Nalāsване, sowing barley and maize seeds in secret worshipping places ( <i>āgaṃ</i> , the shrines of the houses). The bleak sprouts are holy to the Goddess and are taken and distributed as <i>prasāda</i> on the tenth day -Kuchībhvay, a big family feast on the eighth festival day -Syākvatyākva (Mahānavamī), the day of sacrifices, concluded by a <i>sikāḥbhvay</i> in which parts of the head of the sacrificed animal are divided among the family members. Feeding of the living goddess Kumārī by Taleju guthi at night. -Vijayā Daśamī, the day of victory, commemorating the victory of the Goddess over the demon king. At night: <i>pāyāḥ</i> , the sword procession from the Taleju temple -Caturthi Yāyegu: the conclusion of the festival with the disposal of remains.	(Sept./Oct.)	The most important national festival of Nepal
		Kaulāthva 1	
		Kaulāthva 8	
		Kaulāthva 9	
		Kaulāthva 10	
		Kaulāthva 14	
34	Katipunhī, the start of <i>katimata</i> , offering of lights to the sky kindled at night	October Kaulāthva 15	Minor worship

There are also a number of other days which are religiously significant, such as the eleventh (Ekādaśī) day of each bright and dark halves of a month, full-moon days (Punhi), new moon days (Aumṣī), Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays. To observe fasts and to worship Viṣṇu on Ekadaśī is one of the duties for the religiously minded people in Nepal. Mostly women, but also men, may observe such fasts. Many Newar women also observe *vrata* on full-moon days. Observing fasts on Mondays or Tuesdays or Fridays in the name of a certain deity is also popular among the Newar women. Depending on a person's choice such *vrata* can last for four months or one year and in rare cases even twelve years. Most people take the four-month period of Caturmāsa for such *vratas*. Usually, observing fasts means to take a bath, worship a certain deity, eat only vegetarian food and only once a day. However, those who observe Śrīpañcamī *vrata*, are allowed to eat non-vegetarian foods.

There are many similarities as well as peculiarities in the celebration of these festivals from one place to another. Small and local festivals do not receive much attention but big festivals like Dasain is observed throughout the country. Every Hindu family celebrates Dasain festival with great fanfare, while at the state level, thousands of animals are sacrificed at courts and temples on behalf of the reigning king, and army parades are held in the streets of the capital.

This chapter intends to provide a complete view of all the ritual activities, especially rituals related to processions of deities, pilgrimages,

fasts and feast that are observed only in Sankhu. I will try to provide a brief account of all the festivals celebrated in Sankhu and, where relevant, to compare them with those celebrated in other places.

## **Festivals and Rituals**

### ***Svanti: the renewal of the ritual year.***

The festival of Svanti is one of the most important festivals for the whole Newar society. Since we consider the festival of Svanti as the beginning of ritual year in Nepal it will be appropriate to provide a detail account of this festival. Therefore it is treated in a separate chapter to provide its significance and ritual details.

### ***Lord Viṣṇu's Awakening: the end of the Caturmāsa (November)***

This is a festival of the god Viṣṇu celebrating his awakening from his four-month long sleep. People make pilgrimages to different shrines of Viṣṇu in the Valley and fast in his name. Some of the important religious activities are: i. visiting Cāṃgu Nārāyaṇa on Jugādi navamī, ii. visiting four important Viṣṇu shrines on Haribodhinī Ekādaśī, and iii. observance of a fast on the full-moon day of Sakimilā punhi.

#### **i. Jugādi navamī: day of pilgrimage to Sakva Cāṃgu**

On this day, people in Sankhu, as well as people from other parts of the Valley, make a pilgrimage to the temple of Cāṃgu Nārāyaṇa. It is one of the most famous and oldest Viṣṇu temples in Nepal. This temple is situated about five kilometres southwest of the town of Sankhu on top of the Cāṃgu Nārāyaṇa hill. Since it is located close to Sankhu, it is also known as Sakva-Cāṃgu or Sankhu-Cāṃgu. Although modern political geography separates Cāṃgu from Sankhu<sup>6</sup> the sacred ritual geography still combines these two places in one. On the day of Jugādi navamī, people also visit the temple of Vajrayoginī situated north of the town of Sankhu before or after they visit Cāṃgu Nārāyaṇa. This day is also known as the day of visiting Sankhu and Cāṃgu (Sakva Cāṃgu vanegu) (Sharma 2000:27). People from Sankhu and Bhaktapur visit both the shrines of Vajrayoginī and Cāṃgu Nārāyaṇa on this day.

## ii. Haribodhinī ekādaśī: the awakening of Viṣṇu

This is the eleventh day of Kachalā and it is dedicated to Viṣṇu. The day is believed to be the first day on which Viṣṇu awakes after his four-month long sleep (Caturmās). It is also known as Haribodhinī ekādaśī. Hari is another name of Viṣṇu and Haribodhinī means: his awakening. Generally, all twenty-four Ekādaśī (eleventh day of both the bright and the dark halves in a year), are considered to be auspicious for religious people in Nepal. To observe a fast in the name of Viṣṇu and to take a single meal on such an Ekādaśī is common practice. Hariśayanī ekādaśī (July) and Haribodhinī ekādaśī (November) are important as the first one is related to Viṣṇu's sleep and the latter one is related to his awakening.

On this day, religious people in Sankhu pay a visit to the four major Viṣṇu shrines around the Kathmandu Valley: Cāṃgu Nārāyaṇa, Biśaṃkhu Nārāyaṇa, Śeṣa nārāyaṇa and Icaṃgu nārāyaṇa. The trip begins early in the morning. First they go to Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa, then to Biśaṃkhu nārāyaṇa, situated to the southeast of Patan, then to Śeṣa nārāyaṇa to the south of Kathmandu and finally to Icaṃgu nārāyaṇa, situated to the west of Kathmandu. In total, it covers a distance of about one hundred twenty kilometres by a motorable road. Pious people believe that they gain tremendous merits by visiting these four shrines of Viṣṇu, enabling them to obtain success in their life and in heaven after death.

## iii. Sakimilā punhi: full-moon day of boiling roots of the arum lily (*caladium arumacia*)

It is the first-full-moon day of the ritual year according to the Nepal era. Those people who observe a fast (*vrata*) on full-moon days, or on Ekādaśī or on Tuesdays, that fall during Caturmās conclude it by observing their last fast on this day by worshipping the moon in the evening. Women take such a fast. Those who do not observe the four-month long *vrata* also worship the moon on this day. In Sankhu married women and girls are seen observing this *vrata* of the moon. Many also observe a fast on this day, which ends after worshipping the moon. *Halimali*, a combination of fried beans containing maize, wheat, soybeans, peas, rice, sweet potatoes and boiled calladium arumacia (*saki*) is the essential item of the day to be offered to the moon before they eat. On this occasion *halimali* is displayed at the places of singing devotional songs (*bhajan*) in Sankhu. In the Newar settlements, the singing of devotional songs during four months (Caturmās) is a common tradition, which the participants conclude on the

day of Sakimanā punhi. This is also the day to conclude the month-long offering of lights to sky Ālamata or Katimata (see below § 34).

***Bālācarhe, the day of throwing grains in the name of recently deceased people (November)***

The fourteenth day of the dark half of every lunar month is known as a *carhe*. There are twelve *carhe* in a year. The first *carhe* of the Nepal year is called Bālācarhe. Both men and women in Sankhu go to the Vajrayoginī sanctuary to offer grains to deities. Especially, relatives of recently deceased people must throw grains in the name of their deceased relatives. On this day relatives also throw grains in the forest called Śleṣamāntak adjacent to the Paśupati temple in Kathmandu. People believe that throwing grains at sacred places like Vajrayoginī and the Śleṣamāntak forest makes their deceased relatives reach heaven and obtain relief from all the sins committed during their life.

There are two different myths about the tradition of throwing grains in the forest of Śleṣamāntak. One myth tells that once upon a time a man who turned into a demon called Bālāsūr was terrifying people by devouring humans. To stop this hideous act, the king ordered Vṛṣasiṃha, a friend of Bālāsūr to kill Bālāsūr. After killing his friend, Vṛṣasiṃha requested the gods to be relieved from the sin of killing his own friend. On his request, the god Śiva ordered him to throw grains in the Śleṣamāntak forest on the day of Bālācarhe, which would relieve him from the sin he committed. Since then the tradition of throwing grains has been adopted by other people too. Another myth is that, when the god Śiva was wandering in the forest of Śleṣamāntak disguised as a one-horned deer, Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Indra caught him on the day of Bālācarhe. To remember this day, the god Śiva ordered his devotees to walk round this forest throwing grains. He also declared that on the day of Bālācarhe, those who take a walk around this forest and throw grains will obtain the merit of offering gold for each grain they throw and they would also obtain the merit of performing Aśvamedha Yajña for each step taken in the forest.<sup>7</sup>

***Yomari punhi, celebrating the Harvest (December)***

*Yomari* is a steamed rice pastry filled with molasses and sesame seed. The tradition of eating *Yomari* is centuries old. Already during the reign of Amśuvarṃā (578-621 AD) *Yomari* tradition existed (Pradhan 1998: 152). *Yomari* is eaten on several occasions in Newar society. Parents of a married daughter must feed her with *yomari* just before the moment she

gives birth to a child. During the birthday ceremonies of a child too, *yomari* is eaten. Especially when a child celebrates its second, fourth, sixth, eighth, tenth and twelfth birthdays, it is given a garland of *yomari*. Similarly, when anniversaries of any monuments like temples, rest places or traditional waterspout (*lvahamhiti*) are celebrated, *yomari* is offered and distributed. *Yomari* is considered to be a sign of auspiciousness.

A winter feast with *yomari* is one of the important festivals connected with the rice harvest. It is also known as Dhānyapurni or the full-moon day of paddy. Although the first harvested rice is offered to Lakṣmī, it is consumed only during the Yomari punhi festival. On this day *yomari* are filled not only with molasses but also with lentils and minced-meat. On this day, in Sankhu, gods and goddesses are worshipped by offering *yomari* and *samaybaji* in the morning after which the family members consume festive food. Out-married daughters are also invited for a feast on this day. If a daughter is married to a husband who lives far away she is invited on another convenient day for a feast or, she is provided with the necessary ingredients so that she may cook *yomari* at her husband's home.

In the evening of the festival, a worship of the rice store (*kū pūjā*) is carried out. Several varieties of *yomari* are made for this purpose; human representatives like *nāyo* and *bāyo* (eldest and second eldest), figures of gods, goddesses, animals, fruits and nuts like Gaṇeśa, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Kubera, tortoise, frog and mouse are made. After the worship all *yomari* are stored in the rice store for three nights. On the fourth day the *yomari* are brought out from the stores and consumed in a family feast.

On the day of Yomari punhi, a procession of Gaṇeśa in the town of Sankhu takes place. The procession is carried out from the Sālxhā quarter and is organised by a group belonging to a Gaṇedyo *guthi*. Before it is being carried out, the processional statue is displayed at the temple with its fixed statue of Gaṇeśa in the Sālxhā quarter. It is locked up by one of the descendants of the founder of the *guthi*, Nati Kālsingh Śreṣṭha, during the rest of the year.

Another interesting aspect of the Yomari punhi festival is that children go around houses to beg for *yomari*. This act is called *tyachim tyah phonegu*. In Kathmandu, the begging is done on the evening of Yomari punhi, while in Sankhu it is done the next morning. When children approach anybody's house begging for *yomari*, the householder must give them *yomari*. In Sankhu, people also give away grains, if one cannot provide sufficient *yomari*. The children sing a melodious folk song while going around. It goes like this:

Good if it is four *mānā*  
If not one *mānā* is okay



Two *mānā* full is better  
 The *yomari* has a pointed tip  
 It is dark inside  
 It is delicious if you give  
 If not, it is tasteless  
 One who gives is a young girl  
 One who doesn't is a stingy old woman.

(*Tyaḥchi tyo*  
*Bakaḥchi tyo*  
*Lātāpātā kulecām juchim tyo*  
*Yomari cvāmu*  
*Ukiyā dune hāku*  
*Byusā māku*  
*Mabyusā phāku*  
*Byumha lyase*  
*Mabyumha buri kuti*)

Since 1979, the Association of Newar Speakers (Nepalbhāṣā Maṃkā Khalah) in Kathmandu started using this occasion as an opportunity to raise funds. This trend has been copied by many other Newar organisations in Sankhu also. In Sankhu, the branch of the Association of Newars (Nevāḥ Guthi) has been raising funds for their association on this day since 1998.

The third day of Yomari punhi is without any activities, but on the fourth day the final feast is held. It is the day of *ku kvakāye*, or the “day of bringing down *yomari*.” Bringing out of the *yomari* is done in the morning and a feast meal is eaten in the evening. In Sankhu, around the Yomari punhi festival many people also observe their *sī guthi* feasts.

According to NKNP, during the festival of Yomari punhi people began to commemorate the day that Kubera, the god of wealth paid a visit to a poor family in Panauti on which he then bestowed a great amount of wealth.<sup>8</sup>

### ***Ghyocākusalhu, the festival day of clarified butter and molasses (January)***

The first day of every month of a solar year is also known by the name Salhu or Saṃkrānti. The first day of Māgha is known as Ghyocāku Salhu or the first day of clarified butter and molasses. It is the second festival celebrated in the Valley according to the solar calendar. This is one of the most important winter festivals. The day is also known as Makar or Māgha Saṃkrānti. On this day, men and women make pilgrimages to various

ivers and confluences to take a holy bath. People in Sankhu who can afford it, visit places like Haridvar in India for a holy bath, if not, one may visit Devaghāt in the Tarai in Nepal. Those who cannot afford such journeys may visit Śālinadī in Sankhu.

Molasses, purified butter and yam are special foodstuffs of this festival. People put mustard oil on their heads and rub the body with this oil. They believe that it strengthens their muscles and body and makes them healthy. Mothers wish their children a long life when they smear oil on their heads. People also believe that by eating molasses, purified butter and yam they are enabled to bear the cold during winter.

The procession of the Bhagavatī takes place in Sankhu on this day. Bhagavatī is one of the most venerable goddesses in Newar society. She is one of the fierce forms of the mother goddess who killed the demon Mahiṣāsūra. Her temple in Sankhu is situated outside the Bride's Gate (Bhaudhvākā) on the southwestern edge of the town. She is also considered Vārāhī, one of the eight mother goddesses located in the town. The processional statue remains in the temple for the whole day until it is carried out in the late afternoon.

On this day, early in the morning, the processional statue of the goddess is brought out from the Malli *Śreṣṭha* family's house where it is kept during the rest of the year. Every household in Sankhu must carry out worship at her temple and many also offer sacrifices of cocks, goats or sheep to her. In the afternoon, when she is carried out in a procession, the Ipātol bhajan group, Sāymi *dāphā* and *dhā* musicians also join the procession with their music. The goddess receives offerings from each household with rice grains, flowers, incense, *ṭikā* and foodstuffs at every quarter of the town during the procession. A thirteen-member *Śreṣṭha guthi* arranges the procession of Bhagavatī. Four carriers are hired by the *guthi* to carry the palanquin.

### ***Gathu Pyākhaṃ or the dances of Navadurgā (December)***

Sankhu has no Gathu *pyākhaṃ* or dancers of Navadurgā of its own, but once a year the Gathu dancers from Bhaktapur visit Sankhu. Gathu in Sankhu are migrated from Bhaktapur. Among the Gathu families in Sankhu, each branch of the family takes its turn to participate in the Navadurgā dance of Bhaktapur every year. Around the time of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival, some of the Navadurgā dancers visit Sankhu to distribute flowers and five-coloured threads (*pasukā*) to every household in Sankhu to inform them of the dates the dancers' visit Sankhu. In return, they receive some money (five to hundred rupees). Usually a few days

after the information, the Navadurgā dancers visit Sankhu after the full-moon day of Pohelā.

In the year 2000, they visited Sankhu four days after the full-moon day of Pohelā. Their first task is to go round the town to receive offerings from the people. They take round of the town to receive offerings from people on first and second day of their arrival in Sankhu. Many people offer them sacrificial animals. Pigs are the most favourite animals of the Navadurgā dancers. The high caste Newars do not consume pork nor do they keep pigs in their houses, but pigs are raised by low caste Newars such as the Nāy, the Jogi and the Dyolā. The troupe (*gaṇa*) of Navadurgā represents a group of most generous and fierce deities.

In the middle of second night they receive nightly worship (*cā pūjā*) from the Brahmin priests residing at Blampu courtyard. On the third day, they perform several episodes of their dances in the Sālkhā quarter for a whole day. During the same night, they move to Cakhuṃkyaba subquarter in the Ipātōl quarter. On the fourth day, they perform a similar dance there. This is also their last day in Sankhu. As soon as they finish their performance, they leave for Cāṃgu.

In the Ipātōl quarter, there was a house made for Navadurgā in Sankhu, which fell down long ago, so the dancers did not have a comfortable place for many years. In 1998, a new house was built in the same quarter for them. In the past, the twelve-yearly Gathu *Pyākham* from Kathmandu used to visit Sankhu too, but they have stopped since the 1970s. When I asked one of the elders of the dancers why they stopped visiting Sankhu, he said that such a visit was becoming more and more expensive by each time while their income did not increase to meet the costs.<sup>10</sup>

### ***The month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Festival (Dhalaṃdanegu) and the legend Svasthānī (Jan./Feb.)***

Since the month long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Festival (*Dhalaṃdanegu*) and the legend Svasthānī are highly important rituals carried out in the town it is treated in a separate chapter.

### ***Śrīpaṃcamī, the beginning of spring and the worship of Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge (January)***

Śrīpaṃcamī is the fifth day of the bright half of the Sillā month. This day is also called Basantapaṃcamī or the fifth of spring. A local myth tells that Sarasvatī, the goddess of knowledge arrives back from Tibet a day before Śrīpaṃcamī after her long sojourn of six months in Tibet. Therefore, those

who are taking a fast of Sarasvatī the next day, especially schoolchildren, go to smear her stone images with oil. On the day of Śrīpaṃcamī, people observe a fast to honour her. Early in the morning, they take a bath and worship Sarasvatī. They eat only one meal that day. They believe that the goddess will bestow on them knowledge. Many young children also get their initiation in writing on this day. There are six statues of Sarasvatī in Sankhu: one is in Dhomlā, one in Sālkhā, one in Ipātol quarter, two are in Śālinadī and one is in Vajrayoginī sanctuary. Many people also visit her famous temples like Lhāsāpāku Sarasvatī on the hill of Nagarkot, or Idesa Sarasvatī in Bore, and in Svayambhu. At Svayambhu, the shrine of Mañjuśrī is worshipped as Sarasvatī, while in Vajrayoginī there used to be a separate stone image of Mañjuśrī together with the image of Sarasvatī. It was, however, stolen in September 1985. Both Buddhist and Hindu Newars worship Mañjuśrī as a god of knowledge. In Sankhu, the image of Vajrayoginī herself is called Nīla Sarasvatī (Blue Sarasvatī), the goddess of knowledge. To mark the beginning of spring, in Sankhu, on this day, classical music belonging to spring (*basanta rāg*) used to be performed by the Jogi musicians but as we mentioned above, this has stopped since 1996. Today the king himself used visit the old royal palace of Hanumāṇdhokā in Kathmandu to listen to the spring music (*basanta me*) at an auspicious moment stated by the royal astrologer. However, since the country has turned into a republic in 2008 the President has replaced the king. The prime minister, ministers, ambassadors, dignitaries and government officers attend this occasion.

***Bhima ekādaśī, the day of Bhimsen and the procession  
of Bhimsen in the town (January)***

Immediately after Śrīpaṃcamī or on the eleventh day of the bright half of the Sillā month is Bhima ekādaśī, the eleventh day dedicated to the god Bhimsen. Bhimsen is one of the warrior heroes from the Hindu epic, Mahābhārata. He is the second eldest of the five Pāṇḍava brothers. In the epic Mahābhārata, he was famous as a warrior with extraordinary strength. He is also considered to be a son of the god of Wind (*Vāyu devatā*) (Manandhar 1994:64). Since *Vāyu* is considered another form of Śiva, his son, Bhimsen is worshipped as a representative of Śiva. In Dolkhā, a Newar town situated to the east of the Kathmandu Valley, Bhimsen is worshipped in his three forms in a single stone shrine: Bhimsen, Śiva and Viṣṇu at different times of the day, everyday. He is also worshipped as Bhairava (Amatya 1986:25). However, the Newars worship Bhimsen more as a protective god of trade and business than as a mighty warrior or other

forms. Newar traders believe that those who can please Bhimsen are granted good profit in their business. Therefore, Bhimsen is the most popular god in the Newar trading community. They used to carry the cult of Bhimsen wherever they travelled or migrated. From the oldest Newar settlements of Kathmandu Valley to all other Newar settlements, Bhimsen is to be found. Even in Tibet, where they did business, before the Chinese occupation they carried the cult of Bhimsen. In every retail and wholesale shop, Bhimsen is worshipped as the most respected god. He is also worshipped daily in every Newar household. In Sankhu, the god Bhimsen receives great honour.

Besides worshipping Bhimsen in their own residences and their own shops, people in Sankhu have four more statues of Bhimsen at public places: one in the Pukhulāchi quarter, the second in the Mahādev temple complex, and the third in Śālinadī. The fourth in the Dhomlā quarter is the most recent and was installed only in February 2000. In the Pukhulāchi quarter, it has a newly reconstructed temple, which reappeared as a two-tiered pagoda style temple replacing what collapsed during the 1934 earthquake. Since no *guthi* are left to take care the maintenance of the temple, people in Pukhulāchi initiated the restoration by forming a committee and by collecting donations from individual devotees. Local people also volunteered for the reconstruction. In the Mahādev temple complex and in Śālinadī, Bhimsen statues stand against brick walls without roofs over them.

Of these four Bhimsen statues, only the Bhimsen at Śālinadī has a processional statue and an annual procession, which takes place once a year late in the night of Bhima Dvādaśī, a day after the Bhima ekādaśī. People believe that at least one male person in every household must take a vow to Bhimsen on the day of Bhima ekādaśī. Those who observe a fast on this day must take a bath and perform worship to Bhimsen and eat only one meal. It is believed that, on this day Bhimsen observes a fast, it is therefore appropriate for people to observe a fast on the same day too. People trust that Bhimsen will bestow wealth on those who observe the fast on this day. The family, whose member observes the fast, offers an animal or a cock sacrifice to Bhimsen the next morning. If one cannot afford an animal, an egg will do as a substitute. Temples and shrines with Bhimsen remain busy with visitors till the late afternoon.

In Sankhu, there are several Bhimsen *guthi*, but only one of them is responsible for carrying out a procession of Bhimsen. The first patron of this *guthi* was a forefather of the Thakāli Śreṣṭha family, who donated a golden statue of Bhimsen for the procession. This family also donated land for a Bhimsen *guthi* responsible for carrying out the annual procession.

On Bhima Dvādaśī, this *guthi* sacrifices a goat to Śālinadī Bhimsen for their feast. The procession of Bhimsen starts from Śālinadī in the late evening. The golden statue is fixed on a palanquin before it is carried in a procession. The *nāykhim*, *dhime*, Sāymi *dāphā* and Sālkhā quarter *bhajan* music accompany the procession. Many religious people also join with incenses in their hands. As the procession arrives outside the gate of Dhalamkodhvākā, several Nāy families offer worship to Bhimsen. As soon as it enters the town, people queue with offerings. Several families also offer cock sacrifice together with *samaybaji* and liquor. It takes about *two* hours to finish the tour around the town. At the door of the Thakāli family, the procession receives one final cock sacrifice by the family members. Then it receives the ceremonial welcome (*lasakusa*), by the eldest married women of the house, instructed by a Vajracārya priest. The processional statue is taken into the house to be stored for the year until it is carried out in next year's procession. After the statue is stored in a room, the same family invites all people including the musical groups who accompanied the procession through the town to eat *samaybaji* and to drink. Then people walk their way to their homes.

### ***Silācarhe, the fourteenth of the Sillā month (February)***

Fourteen days after the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival, a night-long reunion of the participants in front of the Mahādev temple. Burning of wood stalks in town and the Serpent sacrifice in the forest above Sankhu in February.

### ***Holi punhi, the festival of colours (February/March)***

Holi is known as the festival of colour throughout the sub-continent of India. This festival is celebrated with great enthusiasm all over India and Nepal. Especially the people in Tarai, the southern belt of Nepal, celebrate it with great fanfare. It is not celebrated in a similar manner in the Kathmandu Valley, but it is considered to be one of the important festivals. For the Newars of Kathmandu Valley, the Holi festival begins on the eighth of the bright half of the Cillā month by erecting the *cir*, a bamboo pole with pieces of multi-coloured cloths attached to its top. The festival finishes on the full-moon's day, the day of Holi punhi, after the *cir* is burnt down. In Sankhu, the *cir* is erected by the Sālkhā Holi *guthi* adjacent to the Bhīmīlvāhaṃ shrine in the Sālkhā quarter. Before burning the *cir*, the *guthi* organises a procession with a group of men inside the town who throw vermillion at each other and sing erotic songs associated with Lord Kṛṣṇa. Anybody can participate in the procession. They also

fight during the procession of Holi. In the past, such fights took place frequently between the people of the two halves of the town, especially between the Sālkhā quarter and the Suṃtol quarter, but nowadays, such fights are rare.

For the people of Sankhu this day is also meant for worshipping the popular shrines of Sarasvatī in the Valley. Many people also worship the Sarasvatī shrine in the sanctuary of Vajrayoginī and celebrate Holi together with friends and neighbours.

### ***Pahāṃcarhe, worship of Lukumahādyo, the hidden Śiva (March)***

This is a festival related to Śiva. For the people in the city of Kathmandu it is the time to celebrate their most important festival of the year with the processions of different mother goddesses. For the people of Sankhu, it is not an important festival. They do, however, worship the hidden Śiva (Lukumahādyo) offering *samaybaji*, which includes fish, meat and liquor. These items are not offered to Śiva at any other time. The hidden Śiva is also considered to be the manifestation of Bhairava, who accepts the offerings of all these foods.

### ***Caitra Dasain and Rāma navamī (March/April)***

This festival is not celebrated in the manner people celebrate the Dasain festival in September/October. However, as a festival related to Durgā, it is an important festival. It received the name Caitra Dasain because it is celebrated in the month of Caitra (March/April) on the day of Caitra Śukla Aṣṭamī. On this day people visit important *maṛkā* temples and many people also offer animal sacrifices. People in Sankhu visit the Vajrayoginī temple and offer animal sacrifices to Mahākāla Bhairava. Many people from the Parvate community of the Valley visit Vajrayoginī and offer animal sacrifices to Mahākāla Bhairava. People also believe that Caitra Dasain used to be the major festival in the past but its importance has waned. This day is significant in Sankhu as it is the day Vajrayoginī is invited for the festival.

The next day is known as Rāma navamī the anniversary of Rama the hero of the epic story Rāmāyaṇa. Rāma's devotees fast in his name and worship him on this day.

### *The festival of Vajrayoginī*

The festival of Vajrayoginī is elaborately treated in Chapter 14 because it is the most important festival of the town.

#### *Yaḥsimthane, the erection of Yaḥsim pole in front of Aji dyo in the Calākhu Quarter (March/April)*

A wooden pole (*yaḥsim*) is erected as part of many festivals celebrated in the Kathmandu Valley. Some people believe that the *yaḥsim*, represent the *nāga*, the divine serpents, while others consider it a royal symbol (Manandhar 1986:213). The most revered *yaḥsim* in the Valley is the Bisket Yaḥsim of Bhaktapur, which is erected once a year on the day before the turn of the Vikram Year according to the solar calendar (13/14 April) and it is brought down on New Year's Day (Shrestha 1989). The Indra pole of Kathmandu is another famous pole erected in Hanumāndhokā royal palace square during the Yamyā festival.<sup>11</sup> In Sankhu, once every year, a wooden pole is erected at the Calākhu quarter, in front of the shrine of Mahālakṣmī who is also locally known as Aji dyo, the goddess grandmother. The erection and dismantlement of the Sankhu *yaḥsim* pole coincides with the Bhaktapur Bisket *yaḥsim*. People believe that it is a duplicate of the Bhaktapur Bisket *yaḥsim*. However, in Sankhu, the ceremony of erecting and dismantling the pole is not celebrated in such a spectacular way as in Bhaktapur. In Sankhu, the *yaḥsim* is erected without any connection to the other festivals. In a particular year, it may coincide with the festival of Vajrayoginī, but it is not associated with that festival.

Every year, the same *yaḥsim* is erected, and it is renewed if it breaks or becomes very old. A *yaḥsim* can be fifteen or more metres long. When the *yaḥsim* is erected, *patāḥ*, a long cotton festoon painted with colourful *aṣṭamātrkā* figures on it is attached to it with a rope. During the erection of the pole and at the time of pulling it down the next day, the local people assemble to help. On this occasion, a *dhime* (drum) and a pair of cymbals is played which adds festive mood to the event. The erection is usually completed before noon on the last day of the Solar Vikram Year and its dismantling is completed on the morning of New Year's Day. The next day, as soon as the *yaḥsim* is pulled down, the ceremony ends. The flag (*patāḥ*) is kept in the house of the *guthi pāhlā*, while the pole is kept in an open space at a rest place in Calākhu quarter, to be used again during the coming years.



### ***Māmyā khvāḥ svayegu, mother's day (April)***

The day of the new moon of the Caulā month is the day people honour their mother. It is originally a Newar festival but now other communities in Nepal have imitated it. On this day, sons and daughters offer *sagam*, sweetmeats and clothes to their mothers. It is celebrated at family level. Especially, married daughters are obliged to visit their parental homes with delicacies for their mothers. Recently married daughters are sent to their parental homes with *nhūku* or new load i.e. the load of as many varieties of food, sweetmeats and fruit as possible from their husbands' homes for the first time. Those whose mothers have died may visit Mātātīrtha, a place for pilgrims situated about eight kilometres west of the city of Kathmandu. There, people take bath and offer foods to Brahmins in the name of their deceased mothers. Many also perform *śrāddha*, the ritual food offering to the deceased. In Sankhu, those who do not visit Mātātīrtha, visit the Rājopādhyāy Brahmin's residence to offer food (*nislā*) and *dakṣiṇā* in the name of their deceased mothers.

### ***Akṣaya Tṛtīyā, ceremonial marriage (ihi) of the Newar girls of Sankhu (April)***

In Newar society, small girls have to contract a ritual marriage with Lord Viṣṇu in the form of Suvarṇa Kumār,<sup>12</sup> represented by a piece of unrefined gold. A Joṣī informant explained to me that an unrefined piece of gold representing Suvarṇa Kumār or Lord Viṣṇu is considered to be a divine counterpart suitable for a human virgin girl. According to him, the *ihī* that represents the marriage between a virgin girl and a virgin god, is pure and ideal. It should be done before a girl is nine years old. This pre-puberty ritual is obligatory for all Newar girls except for the low castes like the Nāy, Jogī, Danyā, Doṃ and the untouchable caste Dyolā.

In Sankhu and in Nālā, mass *ihī* is carried out on the day of Akṣaya Tṛtīyā, Vaisākha Śukla (April). This day is considered to be an auspicious day to conduct a real marriage as well, for people believe that the great Hindu god Lord Śiva was married to Pārvaṭī on this day. In Newar society, this day usually concludes the main auspicious period of the wedding, only to start again from the Mārga month (November/December).

The ritual marriage is performed either in a group or individually. In most Newar towns, *ihī* is performed once a year in a mass ceremony. In big cities such as Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur, it can be seen several times a year organised by several groups or individuals. Although the *ihī* ceremony appears to be a Hindu ritual, Buddhist castes like Vajrācārya

and Śākya also consider it essential for their daughters. They do not attend the *ihi* ceremony performed by Hindu Brahmins, but they organise it separately for their children in Buddhist monastic quarters (*bāhāḥ or bahī*). They use a ritual text for the ceremony that is different from that of the Hindu Brahmins.

In the process of the ritual marriage with Lord Viṣṇu (*Ihi*), Newar girls qualify themselves for marriage with a human husband late in life. In the *ihi* ceremony, the girls are given as a gift (*kanyādāna*) to Suvarṇa kumār, and circumambulate the sacrificial fire, but during the real marriage with their human husbands these rituals, which are essential for other orthodox Hindus, are absent. Many also take *ihi* as an example of primary marriage (see Pradhan 1986:111 and Vergati 1995:80). One of my informants, Pandit Gurusekhar Rājopādhyāy, explains *ihi* as a marriage with the Lord, which means that the girl will link herself to eternity. It teaches her to practice self-learning and to learn how to acquire knowledge. According to the interpretation of Vergati, human marriage is no longer essential after *ihi* and, because of it, Newar girls suffer no widowhood (Vergati 1995:76). Some also consider that by marrying the god a Newar girl will never be a widow even if her human husband may die. But in real life such an interpretation does not hold, because *ihi* is only an initiation conducted before they are married off to their human husbands. In fact, the *ihi* only qualifies a girl to marry a human husband. An authority in Newar culture, Baldev Juju, who himself is a Newar Brahmin, writes that *ihi* is only an initiation for the Newar girls, but not a marriage in any sense (Juju 1999: 28). There was a tradition in Newar society that a married woman could escape widowhood by placing back the nuts she had received from her husband, back to the body of her dying husband or to his corpse. This tradition was observed sporadically until fifty years ago, especially among Urāy families in Kathmandu. Urāy, who were the traders in Tibet for centuries, may have been influenced by customs there. The Tibetans have no word for widow because of the practice of polyandry.

In Sankhu, a *guthi* organises the *ihi* ceremony once every year. On the first day, the *guthi* has to sacrifice a goat at the *tvāḥ* Gaṇeśa in Sālkhā quarter. Its meat is served to the girls participating in the *ihi* ceremony. The *guthi* has to arrange two festive meals for the participating girls. The first day of *ihi* is called Dusva or the day of entrance. On the next day, a fire sacrifice is carried out and the girls are symbolically handed over to Suvarṇa Kumār in a *kanyādāna*, the gift of a virgin. As a Brahmin informant told me, from this day onward the girls are not considered virgins (Kumārī). On the first day, they are served meal of boiled rice, beans, meat, and vegetables and the next day they are served milk, curd,

beaten rice, puffed rice and sweetmeats. On the first day, the head of the sacrificed goat is divided into eight parts and five of them are distributed to five eldest virgins (*nyāmha kanyā*, *nyāmha nakim*). In Sankhu *ihī*, these five girls are selected by the *pāhlā* of the *guthi* upon the request made by the parents of the girls. As the *pāhlā*, he has the authority to select the five eldest girls for that year. The Brahmin priests and their wives cook the food to feed the children.

Drinking syrup of granulated brown sugar (*sākhati*) is also a tradition on the day of Akṣaya-tṛtiya. Religious people in Sankhu can be found distributing *sākhati* to bystanders on this day at public places.

***Sithi Nakhaḥ, worship of the lineage divinity, cleaning  
of the wells, start of the rice transplantation (May)***

Worship of the “lineage deity” (*digu dyo*) is one of the daily duties of every Newar household. It is believed that the “lineage deity” takes care of their well-being and prosperity. By pleasing the “lineage deity”, one can gain wealth and success during one’s lifetime, while the lineage deity’s anguish may result in misfortune. Therefore, every Newar family possesses one lineage deity in their house and one outside the town at the *digu khyah*, a shrine for lineage deities. In the beginning, individuals may have provided land for *digu dyo*, but these days nobody seems to possess legal rights over such areas. Such places still remain free, but sometimes schools or hospitals now occupy such grounds. I estimate that there are some seventy *digu dyo* located outside the Sankhu city walls. Inside the house, a *digu dyo* is kept at a secret worship place (*āgam*), where all other secret family deities are also kept. In every traditional Newar household, the secret place (*āgam*) is kept, where outsiders including relatives and married-out daughters are forbidden to enter. Thursday is considered to be the day of *digu dyo* or the day of the lineage deity. People believe that on this day, the *digu dyo* resides on the heads of people, so they must not take a bath as this might wash away the *digu dyo*. For this reason, religious people avoid taking a bath on Thursdays.

Apart from daily worship in their respective houses, once a year every family also worships its *digu dyo* outside their home, i. e., at the *digu khyah*. In Sankhu, *digu khyah* are located around the town. Half-circled tympanum-like stone objects with flat shaped stones without any images are identified as *digu dyo* shrines. Many families belonging to the same caste may share a shrine, as *digu dyo* cannot be distinguished physically. In such cases, they just assume that they descended from a common origin. In Sankhu, I did not find families from two or more castes sharing the

same *digu dyo* shrine. Every individual family may carry out their annual worship separately. When a large family breaks up, the separated families may still jointly carry out the annual worship. In such a case, a *digu pūjā guthi* emerges to formalise the annual worship, e.g., to take responsibility for arranging an annual worship in turn by each separated family.

The annual worship of the *digu dyo* at *digu khyah* is carried out from the day of Akṣayaṭṛtiā, the third day of the bright half of the Bachalā month (April) to Sithinakhah, the sixth day of the bright half of the Tachalā month (June). So, people may choose any convenient day during this period for worship. However, most families choose Sithinakhah, the final day of the worship, because it is considered to be the most auspicious day to worship a *digu dyo*. If any family has carried out *ihī*, the ceremonial marriage for girls in that year, they must offer a duck sacrifice at their “lineage deity” on the day of its worship (*digu pūjā*). The girls who underwent the ceremonial marriage must visit their *digu dyo*, where they receive a ritual welcome. For them, it becomes the last chance to visit their *digu dyo* situated outside their homes; but they do not lose the right to see their *digu dyo* at their homes until they are married. If a boy marries that year, the family may also offer a special worship with a goat sacrifice to their *digu dyo*. Depending on a family’s tradition, the newly in-married daughters may visit their new *digu dyo* for the first time on this occasion.

This day, the sixth day of Kumār (Kumār Ṣaṣṭhī) is also dedicated to Kumār, the Hindu warrior god. Wells are cleaned on this day. Pancakes made of rice flour and cakes made of ground pulse (lentils) are the special foods eaten on this day. The *sābā*, the guardians of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa go to Śālinadī in Sankhu to sing songs dedicated to sowing rice (*sinaṇjā me*). During the three months between this day and the day of Gathāmṃmugaḥ, they stop playing and practicing the music, as they believe that during the time when people plant rice it is inauspicious to play musical instruments.

***Hariṣayanī Ekādaśī and Tulasī piye, the eleventh day of the Dillā month and the plantation of the sacred plant *ocimum basilicum* (July)***

For Hindus in Nepal, this is an important day. They believe that the Hindu god Viṣṇu begins his four-month (Caturmās) long sleep on this day. People honour this day as the great Ekādaśī and worship the god Viṣṇu. They avoid eating salt, rice and meat and eat only vegetarian food mainly made of wheat. Religious people in Sankhu gather at the *bhajan* and spend their day singing devotional songs. They also consume sweets and drinks prepared with intoxicating herbs. On this day religious people in different

quarters of the town also begin a story reciting ceremony (*bākhām lhāyegu*) in the centre of a quarter during four months. Usually during these four months, the Hindu epics Rāmāyaṇa or Mahābhārata or, sometimes Buddhists stories based on the Buddha are recited publicly. Hindu priests, in the case of the epics Rāmāyaṇa or Mahābhārata, and Buddhist priests, in the case of the Buddhist stories are invited for such recitations and religious people of the town attend such ceremonies everyday for four months.

The day following Hariśayaṇī Ekādaśī is the day of the transplantation of the sacred plant *ocimum basilicum tulasī*. Almost every family in Sankhu keeps a small earthen pot containing soil (*gamalā*) in their homes for this purpose. They worship the *tulasī* plants everyday. The *tulasī* plant is regarded as the god Viṣṇu himself, so people consider it auspicious to have *tulasī* plants in their homes.

### ***Gurupunhi, the full-moon day dedicated for teachers (July)***

Gurupunhi is a full-moon day dedicated to the worship of teachers. On this day, students worship their teachers offering them garlands and delicacies. In the past, students were obliged to worship their teachers, but since a new educational system was introduced in 1971, such a custom has been relaxed in all public schools in Sankhu. However, many students still follow the tradition of honouring teachers on this day. It appeared that some of the new schools in Sankhu, students are encouraged to worship teachers but most public schools are closed on this day.

### ***Analā, the extra month dedicated to the god Viṣṇu***

As we know from our discussion the ‘Lunar month,’ the Analā or Adhika Māsa is an extra month, which can fall between any regular lunar months of a year. Usually an Analā month is inserted after every twenty-seventh month. It always begins on the first day of the bright half of lunar month and ends on the new moon day (Aumṣī). In the year when an Analā month appears, all regular festivities are postponed for a month. However, this month is not considered an inauspicious one, because it is again dedicated to Macchenārāyaṇa, the fish incarnation of the Lord Viṣṇu. During the whole month, people worship Macchenārāyaṇa in his temple situated to the southwest of the capital Kathmandu in a small village called Macchegām, a name derived from the one of the ten names of Viṣṇu. Many people of Sankhu visit this temple during this month.

Also in this month, religious people in Sankhu organise the recitation of the Rāmāyaṇa and Mahābhārata epics in different quarters and organise the singing of devotional songs.

***Gathāṃmugaḥ Sinājyā byaṃke, purification of the houses  
from the pollution of the rice transplantation (July/August)***

Gathāṃmugaḥcarhe is one of the important annual festivals. It falls in July/August (Śrāvan Kṛṣṇa) and marks the conclusion of the rice-transplanting season in the Valley. On the day preceding the festival, people clean their houses, wash their clothes, cut their toenails and take a bath to purify themselves from the pollution incurred from the rice transplantation. On the day of Gathāṃmugaḥ, people have to chase away ghosts, goblins and spirits (*bhut/pret*) from their households, which may have entered their homes without their knowledge in the course of the year. Many Newar people take this day to be the beginning of the ritual year. This is also the day that marks the beginning of playing musical instruments, rehearsing dances and dramas.

According to Tuisiṃ Vaidya, a local faith healer, the person who dies in an accident, commits suicide, or dies shortly after birth and does not receive proper mortuary rites, may turn into a ghost, a goblin or a spirit (*bhut/pret*). According to him, no ordinary person can see these ghosts, but *bhut* are able to see human beings. *Bhut* are not always harmful and they do not trouble people unnecessarily, but they can be troublesome if they go hungry. Then, they may catch anybody for food. To be “caught by the ghost” (*bhutaṃ punāhala*) is a general expression when somebody suddenly falls sick. By throwing some rice grains or offering food (*bau*) for the ghosts at a crossroads or the outskirts of the town (*dhvākāṃ pine*), one may get rid of the ghost. When a person encounters a *bhut* face to face, this may bring trouble too. If it happens that a ghost sees a person first, the ghost may fall sick, and if a person sees a *bhut* first, the person may fall sick. According to Tuisiṃ Vaidya, *bhuts* are like human beings, but they are small in size and invisible to ordinary people. Those who are able to manipulate ghosts may benefit a lot from their relationship with them. There are several stories that tell that a certain reputed faith healer (Vaidya) had ghosts working for him and in return he provided them with food.

On the day of Gathāṃmugaḥ, effigies are made to represent ghosts in every quarter of the town. In Sankhu, they are known as *bhu dyo*, the ghost god. They are made from reeds and a plant called *bijāha*. On the top, an old clay vessel, used for roasting grain (*bhājam*), is put at its head and a

face is drawn on it. In Kathmandu, together with an effigy, a Hālāhulu, a person from the lowest Newar caste represents Gathāmmugaḥ. He sits on the top of the effigy when it is dragged away to throw into a nearby river.



Plate 21 A man busy treating an effigy of a ghost god (*bhu dyo*, July 1997).

In Sankhu, human representatives are not present but in every quarter two to four effigies of Gathāmmugaḥ are erected and placed at different crossroads.<sup>13</sup> One is a male and another female Gathāmmugaḥ. These effigies are made voluntarily by the people of the quarter, but in a few cases they are made by a *Bhu dyo guthi*. One of the *Bhu dyo* in Imḷā quarter is made by a three-member *guthi*. This *guthi* has no other function than to make an effigy of *bhu dyo* for the occasion.

Each household has to chase ghosts out of their houses. This is done by removing the old cow dung attached above the doors of their houses in the previous year in order to prevent intrusion of a ghost, and at the same time attaching a new piece of cow dung and a piece of flower called *bhusvām* at the same spot. The old cow dung is carried away on a plate together with some broken beaten rice, the *bhusvām* flower to be disposed of in front of the effigy of a *bhu dyo*. Usually, a woman of the household accomplishes this task. When she walks towards the *bhu dyo*, she carries some straw, which she burns just in front of the main entrance of her house (*pikhālakhu*). Then, she walks towards the effigy of the *bhu dyo*, where

she disposes of the things she carries. When she approaches the effigy, people start shouting at her linking her to the *bhu dyo*. She is associated with the *bhu dyo*. Depending on her age; if she is young then daughter of the *bhut*, if she is old she can be called a grandmother, mother-in-law, daughter-in-law of the *bhu dyo*. If there is no woman in a house, a man may carry out the task. In such a case, he will hear similar male names from the crowd. Superficially speaking, this kind of expressions are only to tease people, but it clearly indicates that human beings are also the relatives of the evil spirits or ghosts and they too may be evil like some of the ghosts.

Within half an hour all the households of the area finish presenting foods to the *bhu dyo*. Then the effigy is dragged away from the quarter to be thrown outside one of the eight gates of the town. Only men follow the *bhu dyo*. Especially young boys follow the effigy beating it with sticks. Before they return to their homes, they have to visit one of two ponds<sup>14</sup> located in Sankhu to take a holy bath or to sprinkle the water of the pond over their bodies to purify themselves, so that no ghosts or spirits follow them to their homes. One pond is located at Pukhulāchī quarter and another is located at the Mahādev temple complex.

This day is also dedicated to Viśvakarmā, the god of craftsmanship. People who own workshops, mills, or motors worship them with animal sacrifices and feasts.

### ***Guṃlā, the sacred Monsoon month for Buddhists (July-August)***

Guṃlā is a sacred Nepalese lunar month dedicated to visiting various Buddhist shrines and temples. In Sankhu, the Vajrayoginī sanctuary is considered to be the main Buddhist site. People visit the Vajrayoginī sanctuary every morning during Guṃlā. Especially, during this month, the Vajrācārya and the Sāymi, both Newar Buddhist castes, and the Nāy, with their special devotional music (*bājaṃ*), carry out a vow to visit Buddhist shrines with their music every day. Such an association to carry out a month-long worship by playing music is known as Guṃlā *bājaṃ guthi*.<sup>15</sup> With their drums (*dhā*), cymbals and a pair of Jogi musicians, they visit the Vajrayoginī sanctuary and worship at the deities in and around the temples. Then they go back to town to worship at all the Buddhist shrines and monasteries (*bāhāḥ*) inside the town. It takes them approximately two hours. These groups follow the same route but choose their own convenient time each morning. After the end of the month, these *guthi* celebrate a *Pāru pūjā* ritual on the first day of the bright half of the



Yaṃlāthva to mark the conclusion of the month-long worship. On this day, the *guthi* members organise a big feast.

### ***Nāgpaṃcamī, the worship of the sacred serpents (August)***

The day of Nāgpaṃcamī falls on the fifth of Guṃlāthva (July/August). On this day, the divine serpents or *nāga* are worshipped. People paste a painting of the divine serpents above the main entrance of their houses, and worship them with incense, flower, sweets, cow milk, rice grains, coins, holy water, red and yellow powder, and fruit. People also visit various spots where they believe divine serpents reside. In Sankhu, people pay a visit to a place called Nāgacāmpākḥā, (hillock with the divine serpents) located a little west of the temple of Vajrayoginī. People believe that divine serpents reside there in a cave and visit it on the day when the divine serpents are worshipped.

### ***Guṃpunhi or Gunhipunhi, the full-moon of Guṃlā (Aug.-Sept)***

The festival of Guṃpunhi derived its name from the month of Guṃlā because it is celebrated in the middle of this month. This festival is also called “Gunhipunhi” or “Nine full moon days” because it is a festival of nine days. This festival begins on the day of a full moon and ends on the ninth day after celebrating the birthday of Lord Kṛṣṇa. This day is known as Kṛṣṇajanmāṣṭamī as it occurs on the eighth of the dark half of Guṃlā. The following are the major activities of this festival in Sankhu:

i. First day of Gunhipunhi (full moon of Guṃlā):

- Pilgrimage to Maṇicūḍa pond and Maṇilīṅgeśvar Mahādeva
- Worship and procession of Mahādeva (Śiva)
- Brahmins change their sacred threads and apply protective threads to others
- Ceremonial feeding of a cow in the centre of the town
- Drinking *kvāti*, a soup made of nine kinds of grains

ii. The day after Guṃpunhi, Sāpāru (first of the dark fortnight):

- Visit to the nine taps, nine caves, nine *bāhāḥs* (former monasteries) and nine ponds
- The cow procession (*sāyāḥ* real cows and cow-masked wooden structures (*tahāsā dhākacā*) are carried around town by the relatives of the recently deceased people

iii. The day after Sāpāru Tāmtāmghisiṃ: processions of stick fighters

- iv. In the course of the week: processions of *baṃmanu* (bushmen), *Dumgā pyākham* (boat dance) and other dances and dramas
- v. The Procession of the god Narasiṃha
- vi. *Vāpijyā pyākham*: mock rice transplantation in dance and drama
- vii. Celebration of Kṛṣṇa's birthday, and processions of the Lord Kṛṣṇa into town

### **i. First day Gunhipunhi (full-moon of Guṃlā):**

Around the day of the full-moon, people make pilgrimages to important shrines and lakes dedicated to Śiva. Among them, Śilu or Gosāinkuṇḍa and Pāṃcapokari are very famous. These lakes are located above the altitude of five thousand metres and require walking along arduous paths for a couple of days. People in Sankhu make the pilgrimage to these places reaching them in four days before the full moon day on Ekādaśī, or on the day of the full-moon day. Those who are unable to make such long journeys, may make a day's pilgrimage to Maṇicūḍa pond or to Maṇilīṅgeśvar, both located on the Maṇicūḍa Mountain north of the town of Sankhu. People include these places in the ritual realm of Sankhu because they lie just above the Vajrayoginī temple. On this day, not only people from Sankhu but also people from all over the Valley make pilgrimages to both these places. They do so to take a holy bath in the Maṇicūḍa pond. For both Hindus and Buddhists, the Maṇicūḍa pond is an important pilgrimage site. The Hindus believe that Śiva made a stopover at the pond of Maṇicūḍa on his way to Gosāinkuṇḍa, while the Buddhists believe that it received its name from the Buddha who was reborn as Maṇicūḍa.

Among the Parvates, this day is known as Janaipurne or the full-moon day of Janai, the protective thread that are worn by Brahmins and Kṣetris. Once a year, they change Janai after taking a holy bath and worship Śiva. Many Brahmins and Kṣetris visit Vajrayoginī to change their *janai* threads. That day, in the sanctuary of Vajrayoginī they are seen offering the threads to the shrine of Vāsuki nāga before they apply it around their bodies. It is also notable that for Hindus the enshrined *caitya* in the temple of Jogeśvar is also that of Śiva. They believe that Buddhists covered the shrine of Śiva's phallus with the *caitya*. On this day, many Brahmins also tie sacred threads (*rakṣā vandhan*) around people's waists, going from door to door. *Rakṣā vandhan* is a sacred thread worn around the arms and is believed to protect people from diseases and evil spirits.

For the people of Sankhu, it is also a day to visit the temple of Jotirlīṅgeśvar Mahādeva (Śiva) in the Sālkha Mahādev Square. This day,

the shrine is decorated with its processional statue. In the morning, those who go to worship Jotirlingēśvar in Sankhu receive *rakṣā vandhan* from a Rājopādhyāy priest. Many Parvate Brahmins from surrounding villages also visit homes in Sankhu to distribute the *rakṣā vandhan* on this day. In return, they receive money (*dakṣiṇā*) and food for a meal (*sirā*) from each household they visit.

This day is also known as Kvāti punhi or the full moon day of *kvāti* from the name of the special soup that is drunk on this day. Every household in Sankhu drinks this special soup made of nine kinds of beans (*kvāti*) as the main dish of the festival. Married daughters and sisters are invited to their parental homes on this occasion. In the afternoon, the Sānake *guthi* feeds a cow during a ceremony in the centre of the Sālkhā quarter. On the same afternoon, the procession of Jotirlingēśvar is taken out in the town.

## ii. Sāpāru (first of the dark fortnight):

After Guṃpunhi, the festival of Sāpāru or Sāyāḥ, the day of the cow procession is celebrated. It is one of the ancient traditions of the Nepal Valley celebrated mainly by the Newars. In Sankhu, apart from the processions of the cow that are held in the afternoon, there is another important religious activity. In the morning, people visit the nine taps, nine caves, nine former monasteries (*bāhāḥ*) and the nine ponds around the town. People visit there individually or in groups. The Newar consider it auspicious to carry out nine different activities during the Gunhipunhi festival. Besides visiting such religious places, people also believe these are the days to do things nine times: bathe 9 times, change dress 9 times, dine 9 times, look out of the windows 9 times, etc.

The major ritual event of the Day of Sāpāru is the procession of cows (*sāyāḥ*), decorated bamboo structures (*tāhāsā*) and bamboo baskets (*dhākacā*) with colourful cloths representing cows. The procession is carried around the town by relatives of the recently deceased persons. *Sā* means cow and *pāru* means the “first day of a fortnight” in the Newar language. Therefore, Sāpāru means “the first day of the fortnight” of the cow. Quoting an unpublished ritual text, Naghabhani (1993:76-7) declares that people began to celebrate the procession of cows to substitute the Brṣotsargaḥ ritual, a ritual on which an ox is set free in the name of their deceased relatives. He assumes that in the long run people may have forgotten its origin and began to celebrate *sāyāḥ*, or the procession of cows. Throughout the kingdom of Nepal the Newars celebrate this day as the “procession day of cows” (*sāyāḥ*). For example, in Kathmandu, the

relatives of a deceased contribute a cow or one or more children dressed as hermits (*sādhu*). These children dressed as hermits go with cow paintings (*sākhvāḥ*) attached to their foreheads to participate in the procession. Each family joins the procession separately. In Patan, the procession is organised by one of the families of the deceased; so four days before the procession all the participants are asked to gather at a certain place. Those leading the procession are children dressed up with cow paintings on their foreheads, followed by real cows and then by a group of girls. A boy walks behind them dressed as a devotee (*bhakta*) of Kṛṣṇa while a Rājopādhyāy Brahmin dressed as Kṛṣṇa, with Rādhā and Rukminī on his right and left is last in the procession. In Bhaktapur, each of the families of the deceased either sends a palanquin with a bull made of clay or a bamboo basket (*dhākacā*) or a bamboo structure (*tāhāsā*) decorated with colourful cloths to the children (*bāsāḥ*) in the procession. It is also a tradition for the bereaved families in Bhaktapur to send Ghimṭāmkisi, a group of dancers with sticks, together with a *tāhāsā*.<sup>16</sup> The Sāyāḥ celebration in Sankhu is similar to that of Bhaktapur but has a many local characteristics.



Plate 22 Relatives of recently deceased people joining the procession of cows on the day of Gāi jātrā (sāyāḥ) (August 1997).

In Sankhu, high caste Newars send a cow, a *tāhāsā*, or *dhākacā* to the procession, while the Nāy, the Jogī, the Dom and the Dyolā send either a *dhākacā* or a boy with a painted cow face on his forehead. Nāy families who can afford to send palanquins with clay images of different deities in the procession do so. *Tāhāsā* are sent mainly by high-caste Newars when an important family member has died.

On the day preceding the procession, a bereaved family begins the preparation for *Sāyāh* by purifying the house. Each family needs to distribute sweet breads (*svāri* and *mālpā*) and fruits such as apples to all the participants of the *sāyāh* procession, especially to those who carry *tāhāsā*, *dhākacā*, cows and the palanquins, and to the boys with the cow paintings on their foreheads.



Plate 23 Bamboo structures (*tāhāsā*) decorated with colourful cloths replace cows during the cow procession (August 1997).

Usually the people from the same quarter or people from neighbouring quarters assist bereaved families in constructing the *tāhāsā*. If the deceased was male, only white cloth is used to cover the bamboo structure, but if female, colourful cloths are used. In the afternoon, a cow is decorated in front of the bereaved family's house. A paper with painted cow face (*sākhvāh*) must be attached to the *tāhāsā*, the *dhākacā* or the

cow, which is later removed and is offered to the Gaṇeśa temple of the quarter where the bereaved families live.

Before they are carried to the centre of the quarter, a Brahmin priest is invited to consecrate it. The chief mourner also makes a symbolic gift of a cow (*gaudāna*) to the priest. The chief mourner and his wife must fast on this day until the procession is completed.

Each of the eight quarters in Sankhu (except for the Imlā quarter, which joins with the procession of the Pukhulāchi quarter) organises separate gatherings for the procession. Members of the bereaved families gather first in the centre of their respective quarters. Each of these quarters has a set of two sided drum (*khiṃ*) and cymbals (*tā*) that are played during the procession. Those families, who send *tāhāsā*, usually hire a pair of Jogi musicians. Members of the bereaving family join the procession holding incense. Many young and old men of the quarter voluntarily join the procession in pairs brandishing sticks in their hands; some of them dress up as women performing stick-fighting dances in the procession. In Sankhu, this dance is called *Tāmtāmghisiṃ*; it looks like an imitation of Bhaktapur *Ghiṃtāmghisi* but it is performed in a different way. The procession route of the *Sāyāḥ* is a little different from the procession of the *Vajrayoginī* procession in the town. Some of the members of the bereaved families distribute sweetbreads and apples to all those participants. After the completion of the procession they return home. If *tāhāsā* or *dhākacā* participated in the procession, they are dismantled as soon as they reach home. If a cow is sent, it is handed over to the *Rājopādhyāy* priest. The cow face paintings are offered to the Gaṇeśa temple located in the quarters of the mourning families. The chief mourners can take their meal only after the completion of the procession. Those who send *tāhāsā* also feed the musicians, friends and neighbours after the completion of the procession. People believe that, on the day of *Sāpāru*, the god of death, Yama, keeps open the gate of heaven to the deceased of those relatives who have sent a cow in the procession that day. They also believe that those who die on this day go straight to heaven, because Yama also keeps open the gate of heaven for them.

### iii. The day after *Sāpāru Tāmtāmghisiṃ*: the processions of stick fighters

A day after *Sāpāru*, *Tāmtāmghisiṃ* or the procession of stick fighters is launched from all the quarters of the town. It is a more grandiose procession than the previous day's *Tāmtāmghisiṃ* because many children, young and old men from each quarter participate in it. As on the previous

day, each procession is accompanied by drums (*khim*) and cymbals (*tā*), which produce the rhythmical tune representing the word *tāmtāmghisim*.

**iv. During the week: processions of *baṃmanu* (“bushmen”), *duṃgā pyākhaṃ* (boat dance), *khyālah* and other dances and dramas**

*Baṃmanu* or bushman: During the day after *Tāmtāmghisim*, many lively activities take place in Sankhu to entertain people. Among these are the processions of bushman (*baṃmanu*) that are carried out with participants from almost all the quarters of the town. In a procession of *Baṃmanu*, one or many men are painted with black colours on their faces and bodies and have small pieces of cotton attached on their bodies with honey to give them a fierce appearance. Drums and cymbals accompany these processions. The bushmen are bound with ropes around their waists and controlled by other men. The bushmen are teased and they are set free to let them chase people.

*Pyākhaṃ va Khyālah*, (dances, dramas and comics): On the days following the *Tāmtāmghisim* processions in Sankhu, people are free to stage street dances and dramas in any way they want. *Pyākhaṃ* is a Newar word for dance and drama. Staging street dances and dramas during the Gunhipunhi festival is an old tradition among the Newars. In Sankhu, many dances and dramas are staged during this festival. Some of them are repeated every year and some are presented after intervals of number of years.<sup>17</sup> Such *pyākhaṃ* are staged on the street in the centre of every quarter of the town. Some plays are quarter-bound or caste-bound. For example, people living in the Calākhu quarter stage the *Siṃgavira pyākhaṃ*, the Suṃtol quarter stage *Satalasimha pyākhaṃ*, while the butcher caste stage the *Nāycā pyākhaṃ*.

Many also began to imitate modern Hindi movies in Newar dramas in the past several decades; in Sankhu these have become known as “drama with curtains” (*pardā pyākhaṃ*). Many people also stage *Jhyāure pyākhaṃ*, which are musical parodies. In all these *pyākhaṃ*, only men are the actors. They dress as women to play women’s roles. Since the mid-1980s with the introduction of modern media, these *pyākhaṃ* are losing ground. The introduction of television has proved a great setback for all traditional dances and dramas in Nepal. In the past years, the abovementioned *pyākhaṃ* were only sporadically staged in Sankhu.

### v. The Procession of the god Narasiṃha

Narasiṃha is one of the incarnations of the Lord Viṣṇu in his half-man and half-lion form. People worship Narasiṃha as the fourth incarnation of Viṣṇu who killed the demon king Hiranyakaśyap and whose son Pralhād was a great devotee of the god. The procession of Narasiṃha in Sankhu is not a very old tradition. A Rājopādhyāy priest told me, it was copied from Patan only in the 1940s. Usually on the seventh day of Gunhipunhi, the procession of Narasiṃha is taken out in Sankhu. For this procession a Rājopādhyāy priest wears a mask of Narasiṃha that is borrowed every year from Patan a few days before. Except for a person who acts as Pralhād and the Rājopādhyāy priest who acts as Narasiṃha, all other participants in this procession are girls. Narasiṃha walks together with two girls on his right and left who are considered to be Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī. All other girls who walk in front of him, either with brooms and who clean his path or throw popped rice, rice, milk pots or *jala* are considered his devotees. *Bhajan* singers and several musical bands like *dhā, nāykhim* follow the procession.

The procession starts in the Balampu courtyard where the Rājopādhyāy priests live. Some time in the afternoon, the procession travels through the same route as does the Vajrayoginī procession. It takes about three hours because it proceeds very slowly. During the procession, people offer rice, fruit and money (*kibhu*). At the end of the procession, when Narasiṃha turns back to the Balampu courtyard, the eldest lady of the Rājopādhyāy family in Sankhu receives him by offering *lasakusa* worship. All the participants fast until the procession is completed.

Most activities during the Gunhipunhi are carried out to entertain people, but the procession of Narasiṃha is a purely religious one, which highlights the divine power of Viṣṇu.

### vi. Vāpijyā *pyākham*, mock rice transplantation in dance and drama

On the eighth day of the festival, Vāpijyā *pyākham* is celebrated. The rice transplantation is in a dance and drama. It can be considered the last in the sequence of performances that are staged to entertain people. This *pyākham* is organised every year by the people of the Ipātōl quarter in Sankhu. Those who are interested in participating in the Vāpijyā *pyākham* gather in the centre of the quarter in the afternoon at about four o'clock. The Bhajan *guthi* of Ipātōl arranges a musical band, while all the participants join the *pyākham* with their own dance pieces, parodies and dramatic performances. As soon as all the expected participants are



assembled, the Vāpijyā proceeds through the town. Usually the procession of Vāpijyā *pyākham* turns out to be very long because of the numerous participants from all over the town. It ends in the same place as where it began. Vāpijyā *pyākham* also brings to an end all the performances of the Gunhipunhi festival.

All performances during the Gunhipunhi festival in Sankhu maintain their separate identity in each individual quarter, but on the final day people from all the quarters converge into Ipātol, for the Vāpijyā *pyākham*. Here they try to show their mutual cooperation and solidarity. It shows that people in Sankhu are not only keen in maintaining the separate identity of each quarter by competing with each other, but they are also capable of maintaining unity among.

## **vii. Celebration of Kṛṣṇa's birthday, and the processions of Lord Kṛṣṇa in town**

Kṛṣṇa's birthday and his procession can be considered the last of the activities of the Gunhipunhi festival in Sankhu. The Kṛṣṇa cult that was adopted from North India, has a long tradition in Nepal. People consider Kṛṣṇa to be born on the night preceding his procession. Almost all the places where people sing devotional songs (*bhajanchem*) to Kṛṣṇa are decorated with an image of the god.

There are five such Kṛṣṇa temples in Sankhu of which only two had processional statues. One statue was stolen in 1994. As for the present, only the *guthi* belonging to Ipātol quarter organises the procession of Kṛṣṇa every year. For this purpose, a bronze statue of Kṛṣṇa is kept at the house of one of the members of the *guthi*. A day before the procession, the *guthi* members bring out the processional statue from its house for display in a local rest place (*phalcā*) in the Ipātol quarter. They keep it there until the next afternoon, when the statue is transferred to a palanquin to be carried out in the procession. The members have to spend a night in the rest place singing devotional songs, as Kṛṣṇa is believed to be born that mid-night. During this night the *pāhlā* has to feed the *guthi* members with curd and beaten rice (*dhaubaji*). On the following late afternoon, the procession of Kṛṣṇa takes place. *Bhajan* groups belonging to the Ipātol quarter and the Sāymi caste also join the procession with their *dhā* and *khim* music. During the procession, salt and *imū*, a kind of medicinal herb (*ligusticum ajowan*) is distributed to people as a blessing from Kṛṣṇa. After the completion of the procession, the statue is taken back to the same *guthi* member's house from where it was carried out a day before. The

lady head (*thakāli nakim*) of the house receives the god with *lasakusa pūjā* at the door.

***Pañjārām, the day of alms giving to Buddhist priests and the day of the goddess Vasundharā procession (August/September)***

Pañjārām, the ceremony of the alms-giving to Buddhist priests is observed once a year on the thirteenth of the black half of the Guṃlā month. Many socio-religious associations and individual families in Sankhu still offer alms to Buddhist priests on this day.<sup>18</sup> In Sankhu this festival is observed together with the procession of the goddess Vasundharā. The Vajrācārya priests, who are mainly responsible for taking out the procession in Sankhu, begin the preparation for the procession a day before it takes place. In the past, the members of the Besa Śreṣṭha families helped them, but they have stopped this since 1996, following a quarrel they had with the Kārki Śreṣṭha families who also are responsible in assisting the Vajrācārya priests during the Vasundharā procession. The quarrel was about the sharing of the rent they had been receiving from the land belonging to Vasundharā *guthi*. The processional statue of Vasundharā that is carried to the town, is kept in the temple of Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju. Early in the morning, one member from each Vajrācārya family must go to Vajrayoginī to bring the processional statue to the town. The statue is brought down to Sankhu and is kept at the rest place of the Svāmlā sub-quarter situated close to the Dhomlādhvākā gate until it is carried away for the procession in the afternoon.

At least one woman from each household in Sankhu visits the rest place to worship the goddess the whole morning. Besides general worship items, people offer her nine varieties of beans used for the soup *kvāṭi*, which they also consume as the main food of the day. She is also offered a plate of half-unhusked rice as an important food. The offering of food made to the goddess is later shared among the Vajrācārya and Kārki families who take care of the procession. They hire four people to carry the palanquin in the procession. They are also obliged to feed and serve drinks to those musicians who accompany the procession.

At about four in the afternoon the procession is taken out. The eldest priest places the statue on the palanquin. All the male Vajrācārya and Śākya priests in Sankhu accompany the procession to receive alms from different *guthi* as well as individuals in every quarter. The palanquin stops at the centre of all the eight quarters of the town so that people can have the opportunity to worship the goddess and offer alms to the priests. MMC-I provides a detailed instruction about how the procession should

make a halt and where it should be positioned in each quarter. As the palanquin arrives at the entrance of the Muḷaṃ courtyard, the eldest priest's wife receives the goddess with *lasakusa pūjā* and it is carried inside the *pāhlā* priest's house. Then, all the priests take a ritual bath before they eat a ceremonial meal (*bhvay*) at the *pāhlā*'s house. The goddess is kept there until the priests carry it back to the Vajrayoginī temple the following day.

***Bauyā khvāḥ svayegu, honouring one's father  
(August/September)***

The celebration of honouring one's father (*bauyā khvāḥ svayegu*) is more or less similar to honouring one's mother (*māmyā khvāḥ svayegu*). It is celebrated on the last day of the Guṃlā month. Like on the day of honouring one's mother, this day sons and daughters offer *sagam*, sweetmeats and clothes to their fathers. Married daughters are also obliged to visit their parental homes to offer delicacies to their fathers. Recently married daughters are obliged to carry *nhuku*, a special load of sweets, fruits and foodstuffs from their husbands' homes, if it is their first occasion.

Somebody whose father has died may visit Gokaṇṇa, a Newar town situated north west of Sankhu. For the whole day, people flood to this place to take a holy bath in the river Bāgmatī, worship Gokaṇṇa Mahādeva, offer foodstuffs (*nislā*) and *dakṣiṇā* to Brahmins in the name of their deceased fathers. Many people also perform *śrāddha*, the ritual offering of food to the deceased ancestors in Gokaṇṇa. The day is also known as 'Gokaṇṇa Aṃsī' from the name of this place. People believe Gokaṇṇa is a holy place to perform *śrāddha* during new moon days. In Sankhu those fatherless sons or daughters who do not visit Gokaṇṇa take a bath in the Śālinadī or elsewhere and visit a Rājopādhyāy Brahmin's residence to offer him food and *dakṣiṇā* in the name of their deceased fathers.

***Cāthā, the worship of the waxing moon and a major family feast  
(Sept.)***

Cāthā is a small festival celebrated on the fourth day of Yaṃlāthva. At night people worship the crescent moon. Many people worship Gaṇeśa together with the moon. Usually, family members gather at an open rooftop of a house to worship the moon. They set up an image of the moon on their rooftop to perform the worship. Fried beans are offered to the

moon and eaten afterward as a blessing from the moon. It is also a tradition among many families that some of their members keep hiding to avoid seeing the moon in the sky in the evening. It is to avoid seeing the moon. People think that when they see the moon on this evening, it is inauspicious, and it might lead to being falsely accused of stealing. Sanu, the eldest Dyolā in Sankhu, had such an experience and from then on he followed the tradition of hiding on this day. After the worship of the moon, a family festive meal is eaten. The day's feast must contain all the ingredients people consume during the main feast of Mohanī or Dasain, their biggest festival. Therefore this festival is also known as a small Mohanī among the Newars of Nepal. However, they do not sacrifice animals on this day as they do during the festival of Mohanī.

***Kāyāṣṭamī, the day of pilgrimage to the shrine of Kāgeśvar  
Mahādev (Sept.)***

The eighth day of the Yaṃlāthva is the day of Kāyāṣṭamī. This day received its name from the pilgrimage place Kāgeśvar, situated to the northwest of Sankhu at a distance of about eight kilometres. On this day, people in Sankhu and elsewhere in the Valley make a daylong pilgrimage to this place. Especially those people who have visited the lake of Gosāinkuṇḍa during that particular year must visit Kāgeśvar to offer water they brought from there. People believe their pilgrimage to Gosāinkuṇḍa is incomplete if they do not make a pilgrimage to Kāgeśvar and take a bath and worship at the Kāgeśvar Mahādev shrine on this day. For the entire day, Sankhu is busy with pilgrims who come from far away places and who pass through Sankhu on their way to Kāgeśvar. Several groups of Tāmāṅg shamans who pass Sankhu on this day perform their shamanic dances in different quarters of the town.

For the people in Sankhu this day is particularly important because of the performance of the Devi dances at night.

***Yaṃlā, the month dedicated to Indra (September)***

People consider Yaṃlā a month dedicated to Indra. In Sankhu, people begin this month with the worship of different deities, calling it Yaṃlāsi *pūjā* (the worship in the month of Yaṃlā). Many people in Sankhu take it that the celebration of the Yaṃlā festival begins with the dances of Devī on Kāyāṣṭamī. However, in other places, it begins with the erection of *yambā* poles. People consider the most important day of the festival to be the day of Yeṃyā punhi, the full-moon day of the month.

In the Newar language, *yem* or *yam* means the city of Kathmandu and *yāh* means a festival, therefore the literary meaning of Yemyā is the festival of Kathmandu. Because the festival is celebrated in a most grandiose way in Kathmandu (Yem) even the name of the month is called Yemlā, Yamlā or Yañlā as many scholars claim. Other scholars are of the opinion that the word Yemyā is derived from the word Indra jātrā; the procession of Indra, the god of rain. Their argument is that the word 'Indra yātrā' gradually became 'Endayāta' and finally was called Yemyā.<sup>19</sup> The erection of *yaḥsim*, the ceremonial pole, at the square of the old palace of Kathmandu, and the procession of the living goddess Kumārī are the most spectacular events in Kathmandu (Pradhan 1986 and Toffin 1992), but these are not to be seen in other places. Although this festival is celebrated in all villages, and in the towns and cities of the Valley, it is not celebrated as lavishly in these other places as it is in Kathmandu.

#### **i. Yambā dyo Svāy, the erection of the Yambā dyo poles:**

On the eleventh day of the bright half of the Yemlā month, the *yambā* poles are erected in the different quarters of the town in Sankhu. On Paṃcamī, or the fifth day of the dark half of Yamlā month they are removed. Each evening these poles receive wick lights from the *guthi* and families who erect them. The erection of the *yambā* poles is done by individual families and by several *guthi* in Sankhu. Such poles are about four meters in length, with a piece of wood of about a meter attached to it almost a meter down from its top, making it resemble the Christian symbol of a cross. The wood is called the hands of Yambā dyo. Then some flower (*bhusvām*) together with leaves, are attached to make them look like outstretched hands. Just above the cross, a facemask made from wood or metal is attached. In Kathmandu and Patan similar poles, or slightly differently shaped poles, are known as Indra, the god of rain. In Sankhu, however, and in Bhaktapur, they are called Yambā dyo. They are also commonly known in the Valley as the Khum dyo, or the thief god. In Kathmandu, they are identified with Indra, while in Bhaktapur they are considered a son of Indra. In Sankhu they are called only Yambā dyo. Surendraman Śreṣṭha and Baldev Juju write that 'because they are displayed during the Yemyā festival so they began to be called Yemāḥdyah.<sup>20</sup> In Patan too they are called Yamā dyo.<sup>21</sup> In Bhaktapur, Robert Levy found them called Yama dyo, the god of death (1992:458). When I tried to verify this however, in 1997 in Bhaktapur, I did not find anybody calling them god of death, Yama. People do not consider Yambā dyo to be the god of death. They called them *khāisi khum dyo* or the "bitter

orange stealing god” in Bhaktapur. In Nālā, another Newar town situated beneath the eastern rim of the Valley, he is known as *tusi khum dyocā* or “cucumber stealing god.”

The most common story about Yambā dyo is the theft of flowers from the coral tree (*palijāsvām*). The story relates how once Indra’s mother needed some coral flowers for her vow. Since there were no trees of coral flowers in heaven, Indra had to come down to earth where they were available. Unfortunately, while he was taking the flowers, he was captured by the local people and insulted for several days until his mother came to rescue him. This story, however, is contested by some scholars, who claim that Yambā dyo was not punished for stealing some flowers, which had no great value in those days anyway but that he was captured by a local tantrist who knew that Indra, the god of rain, had failed to fulfil the tantrik’s demand to bestow rains. As soon as Yambā dyo had fulfilled the tantrik’s demand for a god harvest, ending a prolonged dry spell, he was set free. From then onwards, Yambā dyo began to be worshipped by the people on earth by celebrating the joyous days of rains and an abundant harvests (Shrestha & Juju 1988:64-73).

Formerly in Sankhu, there used to be many associations related to Yambā dyo. However, at present only one association belonging to the Thāru *Śreṣṭha* family continues the erection of a Yambā dyo at the Dugāhiti quarter. One of our informants, Gyananarayan Thāru, remembers that he saw no less than seventy Yambā dyo poles in the eight quarters of Sankhu in his youth, which disappeared one after another, year after year. Many of them disappeared since the *guthi*, which had the duty to erect Yambā dyo, have ceased to function.

## ii. Yemyā punhi, the night of the full-moon of Yemyā:

The night of the full-moon of the Yaṃlā month falls at the end of an important day in Sankhu. The worship of the Hāthu dyo, the god Bhairava spouting beer from his mouth is one of the important activities at the day. Wooden faces of the god Bhairava are displayed in different quarters of the town and home made rice beer and liquor is poured from his mouth through a pipe during the Yemyā punhi.

Apart from the activities of these *guthi*, every family in town observes the Yaṃlā full-moon by worshipping an oil lamp hung on a chain (*dalu*). After the ritual, the family members take the *ṭikā* and flowers as blessings received from the god and consume festive food (*samaybaji*) and beaten rice mixed with yoghurt (*dhaubaji*). Each family also distributes *samaybaji* and *dhaubaji* to the children who come to beg. A special dish of

the day is a kind of pickle made of Arum Colocasia (*phakaṃsanā*). Children enjoy wandering around from house to house begging for *samaybaji* and *phakaṃsanā* until the late evening of the Yamyā punhi. People also walk around the town following the same traditional routes as during Gunhipunhi festival, offering wicks and incenses to deities in the name of recently deceased relatives. Several groups of youngsters go playing a game with a round stone (*ghacā lvahaṃ*); they may also take a tour around town making stops in every quarter with the stone. During the days preceding the festival of Yamlā teenage boys and girls play a game in which such a stone is used. This game is also called *ghacā lvahaṃ kāsā* or the game of the round stone.

***Sorha śrāddha, the sixteen days following Yemyā punhi, which are dedicated to śrāddha rituals for the deceased (September)***

After a person's death, a series of rites are carried out for a whole year at different intervals. Ritual feeding of the deceased or *śrāddha* is the most important act carried out after somebody's death. Depending on the family, sons of the deceased may start to carry out such a ritual from the day of a person's death. For thirteen consecutive days *śrāddha* is performed everyday as the first period of the ritual. Then the next *śrāddha* is carried out thirty days after death.

For a year *śrāddha* is performed monthly and in addition *śrāddha* are carried out to celebrate the one-and-a-half-month, five-and-a-half-month and eleven-and-a-half-month anniversaries of the death. *Śrāddha* performed to mark one-and-half month, six months, and a year after the death are considered important. After these *śrāddha* a second annual *śrāddha* is also considered important. Then, from the third year onwards, an annual *śrāddha* is performed on the day of the person's demise, called yearly *śrāddha* or *bārṣiki śrāddha*. One usually carries out the yearly *śrāddha* for three generations of relatives of one's paternal side: father, grandfather and great-grandfather, mother, grandmother (father's mother) and great-grandmother (great-grandfather's wife). However, during the year, there are other occasions on which *śrāddha* can be carried out for all known dead relatives on both sides. It can also be carried out in the name of deceased friends, servants and animals such as dogs and cats.



Plate 24 Ritual food offering to the deceased during the *sorha śrāddha* (September 1997).

Almost every family, especially high caste Newars, perform *sorha śrāddha*, in which case *piṇḍa* is offered to the deceased maternal relatives as well. This occasion is called *sorha śrāddha*, which is observed from the first day of the dark half of the Yaṃlā month to the new moon day (*āmai*). People believe that it consists of *sorha* or sixteen days, by counting it either from the full-moon day of Yaṃlā or the first day of the Kaulā month, so they call it '*sorha śrāddha*' or the sixteen days dedicated to feeding the deceased. This period of the year is also known as *pitṛpakṣa* as it is dedicated to feed the deceased. Some wealthy people who died without offspring in Sankhu left their assets to run a *guthi*, which performs *sorha śrāddha* for them. Such *guthi* are known as *śrāddha guthi*.

***Bau holegu and Kumārī nakegu (the feeding of the living goddess Kumārī and throwing food to the ghosts (September)***

Newar people in the Valley are concerned about appeasing wandering ghosts and spirits (*bhut* and *pret*). It is done in different ways, but in traditional settlements, throwing of *bau* or food for ghosts is the most common practice. The farmers in Kathmandu throw *bau* twice a year: on the day of Akṣayaṭṛiyā and on the day of Gathāṃmugaḥ to appease the



ghosts. The former act to invite the ghosts to the town so that the ghosts can take care of their homes during the time the farmers are busy with sowing and transplantation at their fields. The latter one is to drive away the ghosts to the fields so they can look after them as the farmers are returned home after finishing the rice transplantation. The ghosts are considered to be benevolent creatures who take care of the farmers' homes and fields if they are appeased properly.

In Sankhu, throwing food for ghosts (*bau holegu*) and feeding Kumārī are taken care of by the Pukhulāchi VDC, which is funded by the Guthi Corporation. The *guthi* that is responsible for these rituals in Sankhu is called the Taleju *guthi*, because it is related to the Taleju temple of Sankhu. In the past, when it was taken care of by a contractor (*thekedār*), he had to arrange all that was necessary for the rituals, but nowadays the Pukhulāchi VDC has delegated these responsibilities to Pañyāju.

#### **i. Bau holegu, the throwing of food for ghosts**

Food is thrown to appease ghosts and spirits. In Sankhu, there are four different occasions in a year when *bau* is thrown. The first *bau* is thrown by a *guthi* during the festival of Vajrayoginī on the night of Bauyā. The next occasion is on the night of Silācarhe, when the Nāy used to throw *bau*. This has been abandoned. The third and fourth occasions are on Yaṃlāgā Aṣṭamī and on Navamī, taken care of by the Taleju *guthi*. In the past, Dharmadas Syārbā, the *thekedār*, took care of these two events but since the VDC took over his tasks in 1992, the Pañyāju, who is also the one in charge of the Taleju temple, arranges the necessary ingredients and cooks the food for *bau*. The Kiśāni, who used to throw the *bau*, also abandoned their task so the chief Mahāḥ performs this duty nowadays.

The necessary worship plate is arranged and *bau* food is cooked at the Taleju temple. The *bau*-throwing team from the temple goes straight to Calākhu quarter around midnight. First, they perform worship in front of the god's rest house, which is called the "entering of the gods" (*dyo dubinigu*). Therefore, the first day's *bau* throwing is also called *dyo dubinigu*. This day is exactly eight days ahead of the sowing of seeds to grow *nalāsvām*, the beginning of the festival of Mohanī. According to the Pañyāju, it is also an occasion to invite gods and goddesses for the Mohanī festival. Throwing *bau* begins after the *dyo dubinigu* worship. It is performed clockwise over the procession route of Vajrayoginī. Two Nāy musicians accompany the throwing of *bau* with their *nāykhim* music. When the team returns to the same quarter, the throwing of *bau* is completed. During the following night, after the completion of feeding the

Kumārī, *bau* is thrown from the Sālkhā quarter where the feeding ceremony takes place.

## ii. Kumārī *nakegu*, the feeding of Kumārī

The necessary objects are arranged at the Taleju temple on Yaṃlāgā Navamī for the Kumārī feeding. Before the feeding of Kumārī, the feeding team has to carry out a sacrificial worship at the temple of Mahālakṣmī (Aji dyo) and at the shrine of Cāmuṇḍā, one of the eight mother goddesses situated in the town in the Mahādevadhvākā square. The team first goes to the Calākhū quarter to worship Mahālakṣmī and sacrifices a she-goat around ten o'clock in the evening. Sacrificing a she-goat to any god or goddess is not a common practice among the Newars, but it is an exceptional case in this context. This is the only occasion known to me in Sankhu. After the worship at Aji dyo, the team goes to Mahādevadhvākā Square to perform another sacrificial worship at the shrine of Cāmuṇḍā, but here they sacrifice a he-goat. Then they return to the Taleju temple where they cook the meat and the heads of the sacrificed goats to be part of the food for Kumārī.

The feeding of Kumārī takes place in the temple of Kṛṣṇa (Rāṃjāpuli), the place where devotional songs are sung, in the Sālkhā quarter. Gaṇeśa, Bhairava and Buri Kanyā are also served food on this occasion together with Kumārī. The Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu belonging to Khucupā *guthi* arrange children to represent these four divine personalities. The same team also feeds Kumārī on another occasion, which takes place during the festival of Mohanī (Dasain). A girl may be selected as a Kumārī before her first menstruation. Similarly, only those boys whose milk teeth remain intact are eligible to be selected as Bhairava and Gaṇeśa. The selection of a Kumārī is done by a lottery among the members of the *guthi*. If they do not find suitable children among the members of the *guthi*, then they may request children from other Vajrācārya or from their married daughters. Jethi Kumārī, the eldest Kumārī, is selected by turn from among each member of the *guthi*. She must be the wife of one of the *guthi* members; neither does she need intact milk teeth nor does her menstruation count in order to become Jethi Kumārī.

The appointing of one's daughter as a Kumārī was an honour to his family. He regards it as a religious tradition, which also gives him merit. Unlike the royal Kumārī in Kathmandu, there is no permanent Kumārī in Sankhu all the year around. Kumārī is designated only for feeding ceremonies in Sankhu. The Kumārī in Sankhu does not have a temple to stay like the royal Kumārī of Kathmandu who has a permanent temple

residence of her own and once selected, is obliged to remain in her residence as a living goddess until she has her first menstruation or sheds blood from her body.<sup>22</sup> A common belief is that once a girl is made to perform Kumārī in Kathmandu, she will have trouble getting married. It is feared that she might become a widow too soon.

The food for the Kumārī feeding is served on banana leaves. Four portions of food are given Kumārī, Gaṇeśa, Bhairava, and Jethi Kumārī. Another portion of food is given to the Mahām. Cooked half-unhusked rice (*vāḱijāki*), beaten rice, sweetmeats, fruit varieties, cooked goat meat, parts of the head of the sacrificed goat (*sī*) and money (*dakṣiṇā*) is put on each plate. The head of each goat is divided into eight parts: the main *sī*, two right eyes of both the goats are served to Kumārī, two noses to Gaṇeśa and the remaining parts of both heads (i. e., two left eyes, four ears, two tongues and four jaws) are served to Bhairava. Jethi Kumārī is served two tails, but the Mahām does not get any *sī*. None of them really eats the food, but they are expected to eat at least a few items symbolically. It is believed that if Kumārī refuses to touch any food it might bring great misfortune or epidemics to the country and the reigning king.

After the feeding ceremony, the feeding team takes away all the four divine actors and the remaining food to the crossroads called Chvāsaḥcheṃ situated to the north of the Sālkhā quarter. They throw the food and leave children there. The mothers of children acting as Kumārī, Gaṇeśa and Bhairava meet them and take them back home. The Jethi Kumārī too walks herself towards her home.

After the “disposal of divine actors” ceremony the feeding team returns to the Sālkhā quarter. There the *guthi* team distributes festive food (*samaybaji*) to people. People believe that eating *samaybaji* this night keeps them strong and healthy.

The final ritual of the night is throwing *bau*. The *māhāḥ* throws the *bau*, and is accompanied by two Nāy musicians playing their instruments. The route taken to throw *bau* is the same as on the previous night and it is completed when they arrive in the Sālkhā quarter their original point of departure.

### ***Mohanī (Dasain) the Festival of Divine Victory (September-October)***

Mohanī or Dasain is the biggest Hindu festival celebrated throughout the kingdom of Nepal by all Hindus. This festival is celebrated from the family level to the state level with great pomp.<sup>23</sup> Maḥiṣāsura is considered to be the chief antagonist of the goddess Durgā, whom she killed, in a

great battle on the black ninth day of Kaulā. Therefore, the goddess Durgā is also known as Mahiṣāsūramardinī or the slayer of the Mahiṣāsūra. Mahiṣāsūra is considered to be the buffalo demon. To commemorate the victory of Durgā over the demon Mahiṣāsūra, the festival of Dasain is celebrated every year for ten days from the first to the tenth day of Kaulāthva. All the mother goddesses (Aṣṭamātrkā and Navadurgā) are considered to be Durgā's different manifestations and they are all considered to be bloodthirsty deities. Therefore, during the festival of Dasain, animals are sacrificed in the temples of all these deities to appease them with warm blood. The sacrificial animals are buffaloes, as well as goats, sheep, cocks and ducks.

For the Hindus of Sankhu and elsewhere, the goddess Vajrayoginī herself is also a manifestation of the goddess Durgā. However, Vajrayoginī does not accept any blood but those who come with animals to Vajrayoginī offer sacrifices in her name at the shrine of Mahākāla Bhairava, who is supposed to be her guardian and whose shrine is situated about two hundred metres below her temple. Therefore, the people of Sankhu as well as from other places visit the Vajrayoginī temple during this festival every day. Especially Parvate people come to offer animal sacrifices on the seventh day of Kaulāthva, the Tāmāṅg on the eighth and local Newars on the ninth. The ninth day of the Kaulā month (Mahānavamī) is considered to be the most important sacrificial day. Among the Newars, the day of killing animals (Mahānavamī) is also known as the day on which “the more you kill the more you gain” (*syākotyāko*). Although it is a great Hindu festival, all the Newar castes including Buddhist priestly castes like Vajrācārya and Śākya also celebrate this festival. People also take holy baths from the first day of the festival for nine consecutive days. These baths are taken in different confluences (*tīrtha*) early in the morning before dawn, so people call it the bathing of nine nights (*navarātri molhuigu*). In Sankhu, every family observes this festival; it is a family affair but excludes married daughters, guests and outsiders. The sowing of *nalāsvām* at the Taleju temple, the offering of animals to Taleju and the *pāyāḥ* procession during the night of Vijayā Daśamī can be considered the celebration of this festival on the public level. The following can be considered the major activities of Mohanī in Sankhu:

1. Nalāsvane: sowing barley and maize seeds in secret shrines (*āgaṃ*). The bleak sprouts are dedicated to the Goddess and are taken and distributed as *prasāda* on the tenth day.
2. Kuchībhvay: a big family feast on the eighth festival day

3. Syākvatyākva (Mahānavamī): the day of sacrifices, concludes with a *sikāḥbhvay* in which parts of the head of the sacrificed animals are divided among the family members. Feeding the living goddess Kumārī by Taleju *guthi* in the night.

4. Vijayā Daśamī: the day of victory, commemorating the victory of the Goddess over the demon king. At night: *pāyāḥ*, sword procession from the Taleju temple.

5. Caturthi Yāyegu: the conclusion of the festival with the disposal of remnants.

In the following sections I shall first present a picture of the celebration of Mohanī among individual families, then an account of the Taleju worship in Sankhu.

### **i. Family rituals**

Individual families begin the preparation of Mohanī by cleaning their houses with smearing the floor with red clay and painting the walls with white clay. Traditionally, the white washing of the walls of houses is done once every year. For the Newars in Sankhu, the most important days of the Dasain festival are: the first day being the day of sowing seeds, the eighth day *kuchibhvay*, the ninth as the day of sacrifice and *sikāḥbhvay*, and the tenth being the day of *svām̐kokāyegu*, the harvesting of bleak sprouts.

### ***Nalāsvane: sowing barley and maize seeds***

The first day of Kaulāthva is the day to sow barley and maize seeds in secret shrines (*āgam*) of the houses where *āgam dyo*, *digu dyo*, Lakṣmī and Durgā are kept. It is to grow bleak sprouts (*nalāsvām*), which are dedicated to the Goddess and are taken and distributed as *prasāda* on the tenth day of the ritual. Early in the morning before any crow flies, the eldest woman of the house brings in holy water (*nilaḥ*) and makes the plates ready for the sowing ritual. One of the members of the house fetches white sand from the Bhulbhu hill, situated about three kilometres northwest of the town. To plant the seeds, white sand is spread on the ground in a square metre in the secret room where the shrine of the goddess Durgā is located. In most cases, the eldest married female member of the house sows the seeds, but if she is menstruating, her junior in married female may perform the task. Unmarried daughters are not supposed to sow the seeds. In many houses the eldest male member of a house can also carry out this task.

Depending on the size of the family, this task can take one to two hours to complete. Most people read Caṇḍīpaṭh, which is a Sanskrit text that contains hymns of Durgā. One can also pray to her without any recitation of texts. On the first day, all the family members are supposed to attend the worship session in the secret room. After the ritual, family members eat *samaybaji*. Every evening, one of the female members of the house burns wicks to the seeds and to goddess Bhagavatī. Every morning, the eldest lady of the house must water the seeds and offer *samaybaji* for ten days, until the bleak sprouts are harvested in a ritual ceremony on the tenth day of the Mohanī. For the first seven days no special activities take place in the room, but on the eighth day the installation (*svanegu*) of liquor pots containing several varieties of liquor (*thāpim*), weapons and tools takes place. These are to be distributed among the family members on the tenth day after the ritual. From the ninth day, a cock or a duck is sacrificed as part of the secret worship.

### ***Kuchibhvay: The family feast on the eighth day of the festival***

The eighth day is the first major day of the feast for the Newars in Sankhu. On this day they avoid eating cooked rice, but use beaten rice instead. In the morning they eat *samaybaji* with varieties of meat dishes and liquors. In the evening, the major feast (*kuchibhvay*) is held. Many people believe that this feast was called *kuchibhvay* because two full *mānā* (*kuchi*) beaten-rice is served to everybody attending the feast. Others argue that this feast started to be called *kuchibhvay* because all the clan (*kula*) members are assembled for the feast. They consider it to be a “clan feast” (*kulachi bhvay*), and therefore call it *kuchibhvay*.

The eldest member of the house sits at the head of the row for the feast followed by his juniors according to age. Prior to the feast, the eldest person worships a *sukundā* lamp containing an image of Gaṇeśa. All the family members throw some rice to *sukundā*, and then one of the female members of the house puts *ṭikā* on the foreheads of all the family members. Then they are handed over *sagam* (boiled egg together with lentil, cake, fish, a piece of meat and liquor) and the feast begins. Women usually eat their meal after they have finished serving the male members.

### ***Syākvatyākva: the day of sacrifices***

On this day, people kill as many animals as they can afford. In Sankhu, most families sacrifice a goat to Mahākāla Bhairava in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. They also offer animal sacrifices in their own locality at the

Gaṇeśa shrine and to important *māṭṛkā* shrines around the town. On this day, the eldest male member of the house carries out the ritual sacrifices of animals in the *āgaṃ*. This day too, all the family members must attend the ritual in the *āgaṃ*. The most important ritual of the day's worship at the *āgaṃ* is the making of black soot from an oil lamp. The black soot is also called *mohanī* or charm. People believe that from the name of the soot the Newar name of this festival is derived.

A piece of red cloth offered to the goddess Durgā is used as garland (*kokhā*) in the next day. In the morning, people eat only *samaybaji*, together with the meat from the sacrificed animals. The day's ceremony is concluded by a *sikāhbhvay* in which parts of the head of the sacrificed animal are distributed among the family members during a meal eaten in the evening. If the sacrificed animal is a goat or sheep, its head is divided into eight parts but in the case of a cock or duck only its head is considered a *sī* and given to the eldest male member of the house.

### ***Svām kokāyegu: the harvesting of the sprouts***

The tenth day is the celebration of divine victory over the demon, so people call it Vijayā Daśamī ("the tenth day of victory"). People consider it as the most important day of the festival. The main ritual involves harvesting of the sprouts in the secret shrine. This ceremony is known as the "bringing down of flowers" (*svām kokāyegu*). All the family members, both male and female, must gather in the worshipping place during this ceremony. The eldest male member of the house carries out a series of rituals. First, the harvested sprouts are offered to Durgā, then to Āgaṃ dyo and Digu dyo. Other members of the family are also obliged to worship, following the eldest male member. Every family worships a girl child as a Kumārī this day. If a family has no girl to perform the ritual that family must find a girl child from neighbours for this purpose.

After the completion of the worship, the eldest male takes the red *ṭikā* made of red powder, rice, popped rice and curd and black soot on his forehead, then he puts some bleak sprouts on his head and a band of red cloth around his neck as a garland. At the same time, he also takes one of the weapons (swords, guns, spades, sickles, etc.) installed in the room and cuts open a large green citrus fruit (*bhogatyā*).<sup>24</sup> Then he gives blessings (red *ṭikā*, soot, *nalāsvām* and a piece of red cloth garland) to the junior male members. He also hands over to them some fruit and knife to cut it. Cutting the fruits symbolises the killing of demons. Women are handed over liquor pots together with blessings (the red *ṭikā*, soot, *nalāsvām* and a piece of red cloth garland), but no knives. Immediately afterward, they

serve liquor from those pots to all the family members as blessings together with *samaybaji*, which is eaten in the shrine as a part of the rituals. After eating *samaybaji* they may come out from their worship room. Soon after cutting the pieces of fruit, one or two limbs of sacrificed cocks or ducks are disposed of at the *pikhālakhu* in front of one's house.

A family may begin inviting neighbours, friends and relatives to distribute blessings and feed a feast (*nakhaṭyā*) on the same day. Married daughters and sisters are invited on the same day to offer them a feast and to give them blessings. The distribution of blessings may continue until the fourteenth day of Kaulāthva. On this day, a final ritual is performed in the secret *pūjā* room, after which it is cleaned. Together with the sand, the remains of the sprouts are thrown away in the river Śālinādī in Sankhu. Family members take flowers and *ṭikā* as blessings and eat *samaybaji*. The concluding worship is called *caturthi pūjā* or *caturthi yāyegu*. This is the conclusion of the celebration of Mohan.

## ii. Sankhu Taleju Rituals

The Taleju temple in Sankhu is not located close to *lāyku* or the royal palace as in other towns. The Taleju *guthi* that is now under the authority of the Pukhulāchi VDC is taking care of rituals related to the Taleju temple in Sankhu.<sup>25</sup> Eight people are involved in the Taleju rituals in Sankhu: two Pañyāju, two Kvābhāri, two Chembhāri, a Joṣī and a Mahām. This team is also responsible for throwing *bau* and the feeding of Kumārī in Yamḷāgā. During the Mohanī festival, this team is also responsible for carrying out rituals related to Taleju. Pañyāju or the *pūjābāhrī* is the *yajamāna* who has to prepare plates of offerings for all the rituals related to Taleju, while a Joṣī, priest plays the role of priest for all the rituals related to Taleju. After the death of the Panchalal Joṣī, his nephew Mibahadur has now taken over the priestly duties.

### *Sowing of seeds (Svām tayegu)*

On the first day of the Mohanī festival, the rituals in the Taleju temple begin with sowing seeds. White sand is spread in the secret *pūjā* room in an area of one and a half square metre to sow the seeds in. Only barley and maize are used as seeds. There are no images of gods and goddesses in the secret room of Taleju except old swords, which are invoked as Devī, Durgā or Kālī and worshipped everyday. At the time of sowing seeds, a duck is sacrificed. Sacrificed duck meat is divided equally among the priest, Pañyāju, Kvābhāri and Mahām. Two Nāy musicians are invited to



play their music during the worship and the sowing of seeds. On Dvitiyā and Tṛtīyā no sacrifices take place, only worship and watering the seeds are done. The Nāy musicians are not invited these two days. On Caturthī, again a duck is sacrificed, together with the daily worship. Its meat is divided in the same manner as on the first day. On this day, the Nāy musicians again come to play their music at the time of the ritual. Then, on Pañcamī, Ṣaṣṭhī, and Saptamī, no sacrifices are offered and the Nāy musicians are absent but regular worshipping and watering continue every day.

### ***Mahāṣṭamī***

In the morning of Mahāṣṭamī, a duck is sacrificed in the Taleju temple. The Nāy's musicians also come to play music. Liquor pots and weapons are installed in the temple. During the same night, the Taleju *guthi* carries out sacrificial worship at three different shrines in Sankhu. The first one is the Aji dyo shrine in the Calākhu quarter, the second one at the Bhīmṭvāhaṃ shrine in the Sālkhā quarter, and the third the Bhagavatī shrine at Bhaudhvākā. At each place, a goat is sacrificed. After the sacrificial worship at Bhīmṭvāhaṃ *samaybaji* is distributed but at the two other places this is not done. The sacrificial team goes with Nāy and Jogi musicians to these places late in the night. When the team goes out from the Taleju temple, the goat that steps out first from the Taleju temple is sacrificed to Aji dyo, the second is for Bhīmṭvāhaṃ and the third one is for Bhagavatī.

### ***Mahānavamī***

This day's main worship is performed outside the Taleju temple with the sacrifice of a young buffalo (*khā mecā*). In 1997, the Joṣī priest carried out the worship of the buffalo before the sacrifice. Its blood was sprayed on the southern wall of the Taleju temple. The Nāy and Jogi musicians were playing their music during the worship and the sacrifice. The head of the sacrificed buffalo was carried out in the sword procession (*pāyāh*), which takes place on the following night, while its meat is divided among the Taleju team members and is also given as blessing to the distinguished people of the town. After the buffalo sacrifice, the sacrificial team entered into the Taleju temple to perform regular worship there. First, a goat was sacrificed at the gate of the temple, then, a duck was sacrificed to the Gaṇeśa statue on one of the inner walls of the temple. The Joṣī priest entered the temple room with a goat and requested the Chembhāri, one of

the members of the Taleju team, to kill the goat. I was, however, not permitted to witness the activities inside the worship room. Sacrificed goat's meat was shared among the Taleju team members. The same day they began cooking food for ghosts (*bau*) to be thrown during the ceremonial procession of swords that was held the next night.

This day, in a separate ceremony, a buffalo is killed in front of the Lāyku, the old palace building in the Imlā quarter. As we know, the building of Pukhulachi VDC now stands over the old palace grounds, but during the Mohanī festival, a Brahmin priest is invited to sow seeds and perform worship ten consecutive days in one of the rooms of the building. It is a symbolic recognition of the importance of the former palace.

The Taleju *guthi* feeds the living goddess Kumārī at night. This time, the feeding team goes straight to the house of the Vajrācārya priest, whose daughter acts as Kumārī for this purpose. Nāy and Jogi musicians also accompany the team. On this occasion, they only feed Kumārī, and not Gaṇeśa, Bhairava and Jethi Kumārī.

### *Vijayā Daśamī*

In the morning, during the daily worship, a duck is sacrificed at the Taleju temple. The major ceremony of the day is the “sword procession” (*pāyāḥ*) held in the premise of Taleju temple in the late evening. In the past, seventeen people used to participate in the sword procession but nowadays some of them are not attending it anymore. Two sword carriers called *pañcakha* from the trader's community (*sahumahājana*), three *cheṃbhārī*, one front-symbol (*agādi nisāna*) carrier and tail-symbol (*pachādi nisāna*) carriers have stopped attending the sword procession. Nowadays, those present during the sword procession are: four Svāmka (decorated flowers on two bamboo pieces) carriers (a Panyāju, a Kvābhārī-Kisi or Pandit, a Kaji and a Mādhav Nārāyaṇa carrier during the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival that year), a Nāy with the buffalo head, another Nāy with ghost's food (*bau*), a member from Hāylā Śreṣṭha family with a bow, two persons with earthen bowls containing betel nuts and two persons with sticks.

In front of the procession, walks the Nāy with *bau* in his hands who is followed by another Nāy with buffalo head in his hands, the sword carriers, then Nāy and Jogi musicians. From the Taleju temple, the procession proceeds towards the Kvāthcuka gate, to the Supākhyah inside the present day Bhāgyodaya School grounds, then to Bhaudhvākā gate and the Vasimāko subquarter and back to the Taleju temple. In front of the Taleju temple, a pumpkin is kept on the ground to be cut by the people in

the procession. First the Chembhāri, then the Pañcakha, then the Nāyo is allowed to cut the pumpkin. All the participants must keep shivering throughout the procession as if they were in a trance to show that they are possessed by divine power. After the completion of the procession, the uncooked buffalo head is divided among the members of the Taleju team.

### ***Caturthi Yāyegu***

The last ritual in the Taleju temple is cleaning up the remnants of the sprouts. Throwing away the remnants of the last ritual is done in the temple on the day of Caturdaśī. This concludes the festival of Mohanī for the year.

### ***Katipunhī: and start of katimata***

On this day, people begin with offering light to the sky, which is called *katimata* or *ālamata*. They erect bamboo poles on the open rooftops of their houses for offering a lamp every morning and evening. The lamp case is hung on the pole with a rope so that it appears as if the lamp is hanging in the air. The *katimata* pole is brought down after a month on the day of Sakimilā punhi, the full-moon day of Kachalā.

In the succession of the calendrical rituals I presented here, the offering of lights to the sky is the last one, but it is not the end of the ritual cycle. It is a month-long offering of lights, which continues till Sakimilā punhi, the full-moon day, which is important as the last day of the Caturmāsa. At the same time the festival of Svanti falls in between the month-long offering of light to the sky, which was adopted at the beginning of ritual year in Nepal.

## **Some remarks on the classification of festivals**

In this chapter, I have supplied an account of thirty-four different feasts, festivals, fasts, pilgrimages and processions, which are carried out by the people of Sankhu. Naturally, some of them are extremely important as local festivals, while others are of less value, limited sometimes to a single quarter or of concern only to one single *guthi* or caste. It has become clear, that not all are celebrated in a grand manner, and neither do they receive equal attention. To give a calendrical order I have put all these ritual celebrations in a single list. However, they cannot easily be understood satisfactorily without examining their real nature. In this section, I will

analyse them briefly according to the nature of their celebrations and the way people evaluate them.

Depending on the nature of the celebrations, Newar festival rituals can be classified into various categories. For example, most Nepalese, transcending ethnic or caste boundaries celebrate some festivals such as Svanti (Tihār), Holi, Nāga Pañcamī or the day of worshipping divine serpents and Mohanī (Dasāin). These festivals can be considered national festivals. They are celebrated not only in Nepal but also in India and in a grand manner. Of course, celebrations of these festivals in Nepal are quite different from the way they are celebrated in India. Inside Nepal too, each ethnic group may celebrate them in a distinct way and sometimes within one group, the way of celebration may vary from place to place and from family to family.<sup>26</sup> For the Newars, Mohanī and Svanti are very important annual festivals (*nakhah*). As we showed above, during these festivals, big feasts are organised by family, clan and kin group (*bhochi/phuki*). Married daughters (*mhāymasta*) and their husbands (*jilajam*) and children (*bhināmasta*) are invited for feasting (*nakahtyā bvanegu*). For the Newars, Nāgapañcamī and Holī are important, but not celebrated with any feasts, while the people in the Tarāi and in India celebrate both these festivals in a grand manner.

Most other festivals are Newars', because during such festivals no other ethnic groups of Nepal directly participate. Even when they do celebrate these rituals they do so differently from the Newar way. For instance, Sakimilā punhi is observed only by the Newars; every family worships the full-moon in the evening and eats fried beans, sweet potatoes and roots of the arum lily (*caladium arumacia*) and Newar girls may observe a day-long fast on this day. Other ethnic groups do not have this tradition. Similarly Yomaripunhi, Pāhāṃcarhe, Digu pūjā, Gathāṃmugaḥ, Kvāti punhi, Sāyāḥ or the processions of the cows, Pañjārām or the day of giving alms to Buddhist priests, Cathā or the day to worship the crescent of the moon and Gaṇeśa, Yaṃyā, or the festival dedicated to Indra, are celebrated by the Newars only.

Some of the festivals that are celebrated by the Newars are also celebrated by the Parvates, such as Bālācarhe or the day to throw grains in the name of recently deceased relatives, the day of eating ghee, molasses and yam (Ghyocākusalhu), the observation of Svasthānī *vrata*, Śivarātri (Sillācarhe), Hariśayanī Ekādaśī or the beginning of the Caturmās and the birthday of the Lord Kṛṣṇa (Kṛṣṇajanmāṣṭamī).

There are several festivals that are celebrated by the Newars at same places, but not by Newars elsewhere. Such local festivals have their own importance, but are ignored by others. For instance, the annual festival and

procession of Indrāyaṇī is important for the people of Cugām, a small Newar village situated about three kilometres west of Sankhu. However, for the people in Sankhu it has no such value. In the case of Sankhu, the processions of Gaṇeśa on the day of Yomaripunhi, Bhagavatī on the day of Ghycākusalhu, Bhimsen on the twelfth day of the Sillā month, Gorakhanāth on the day of the full-moon of Sillā, Narasiṃha on the sixth of Guṃlāgā, Kṛṣṇa on the day Kṛṣṇāṣṭamī and Vasundharā on the day of Pañjārām can be placed as local events of Sankhu. These processions are locally important but not popular beyond the town. Each of these processions can also be classified as quarter (*tvāḥ*) oriented, such as the procession of Gaṇeśa which is carried out from the Sālkhā quarter and responsibility for which is taken by a single *guthi* of that quarter, so that the people of other quarters have nothing to do with it except to worship the procession when it arrives in their respective quarters. Similarly, the procession of Bhagavatī is the duty of the Ipātol quarter only. Sometimes, certain procession of deities can also be considered group- or caste-bound, such as the procession of Bhimsen, which is considered to be the concern of traders in Sankhu, while the procession of Gorakhanāth particularly belongs to the Jogi caste. The erection of the pole (Yasim thanegu) is the duty of a single *guthi* and is restricted to the Calākhu quarter. The Dances of Devī, in which the goddess Vajrayoginī manifests herself, are centred in the Calākhu quarter. However, this involves people from different quarters of the town and all the people in Sankhu consider it an important event. Every household must worship during its nightly procession in the town. However, not too many people beyond Sankhu know about it and outsiders seldom come to witness the dance.

In certain cases, even though they are local festivals, they may attract people from areas beyond. For instance, the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival in Sankhu, which is a local festival, has become so popular that not only the Newars of different settlements but also many Parvates from different places began to participate in it. Another is the annual festival and the procession of the goddess Vajrayoginī, which is the most important festival for the people in Sankhu, but which also attracts plenty of people from outside it. However, the outsiders are just an audience and they come only to watch the grand show, while the people in Sankhu really participate and celebrate it with feast and fun. During the festival of Vajrayoginī, the king himself is seen as the chief patron (*yajamāna*). In this respect, this festival can be called a national festival too.

Feasts with special foods are also an important part of any Newar festival or procession of deities. As I already mentioned, it is customary to eat a certain kind of food on a special moment or day of a certain festival.

From the viewpoint of eating and drinking, Mohanī can be considered the most lavish annual festival of the Newars. During the procession and festival of the main deity of a particular city, town or village, people of that area consume plenty of food and drink. In this respect, the festival and the procession of Vajrayoginī can be considered the second biggest festival for the people in Sankhu, after Mohanī. Then the Svanti comes, followed by other annual and seasonal festivals like Yomaripunhi, Ghyocākusalhu, Digu pūjā, Gathāmmugahcarhe, Gumphuni, Cathā, Māmyākhvāḥ svayegu, Bauyākhvāḥ svayegu, etc. All these festivals are important from the viewpoint of eating special foods and feast meals. During all these festivals too, to invite married daughters, their husbands and children, for a feast to the parental homes is customary. However, during the procession and festival of the main deity of the city, town or village, not only married daughters but also maternal relatives of daughter-in-laws, their friends and neighbours are invited for the feasts. In Sankhu, during minor festivals no special feasts are observed and neither are married daughters entertained by feasting.

The plantation of Tulasī and the worship of Nāga are minor rituals, but no household in Sankhu fails to carry out these rituals. The worship of teachers is traditionally prevalent among young students, but not taken as an important ritual. As already mentioned above, its importance is declining with the popularity of modern education. Most worships and *vrata* in Newar society involve the participation of women. There are a few *vrata* like the Bhima ekādaśī, which is meant only for men.

For religious Newars, the four months' period of Caturmās (July-November) is the best time to let Brahmins or Vajrācārya priests recite (*bākhām kanegu*) religious scriptures in the centre of cities, towns and villages. Usually, Bhagavad-Gita, Mahābhārata, Rāmāyaṇa (in the case of Hindu scriptures) and the life of Buddha or other Jātaka stories (in the case of Buddhist scriptures) are recited during this period. Many scholars interpreted Caturmās as an inauspicious, dangerous or evil hunted period, but without satisfactory reasons (Gaborieau 1982:15-16 and 23). Ishii disagreed with such assumptions and takes it differently (Ishii 1993:43-44). Generally, people avoid carrying out any life cycle rituals like Ihi, Bārhatayegu, Kaytā pūjā and marriages during the Caturmās period, but if needed exceptions are made with permission of an astrologer. Bārhatayegu, the twelve days' confinements for girls can be performed during this period. Similarly, the tenth day of Dasāin, the day of victory of the goddess Durgā, is considered to be one of the most auspicious days, so people may carry out any life-cycle ritual like Kaytā pūjā or marriage on this day. From the viewpoint of performing domestic as well as cosmic

rituals, Caturmāsa cannot be considered an inauspicious period, because major festivals of the year fall in this period.

Svarha *śrāddha* or the fourteen to sixteen days' period dedicated to ancestor-worship or to performing *śrāddha* to feed and worship deceased relatives is another important annual ritual among the Newars. During this period, Newar people in Sankhu perform a *śrāddha* to all their deceased relatives, including deceased friends, servants and pet animals. The Parvate and Indian Hindus also perform annual *śrāddha* during this period. *Śrāddha* is generally considered to be a domestic ritual, because, as deceased ancestors are invoked, worshipped and offered food, it is limited to a family and not to a deity. However, scholars like Das disagree with this (Das 1977:120). Although the deceased are not deities they are not human beings either. To a certain extent, the deceased are deified by worshipping them annually. To observe anniversaries of deceased ancestors is to pay them respect as gods '*pitṛ deva*.' This makes it clear that they are not considered one with the family members. Hence, ancestor-worship or *śrāddha*, although it is a ritual performed by the family, is difficult to categorise as a domestic ritual. For this reason, I have listed the annual Svarha *śrāddha* as a calendrical ritual, signifying that it is not just a domestic ritual.

Other important aspects of annual Newar rituals are the worship and the offering of foods to ghosts (*bhut pret*) to pacify evil spirits. In this regard, Gathāmmugaḥ is the most important one. On this day, every household in Sankhu worships ghosts to drive them away from their houses. They also make effigies of ghosts in every quarter of the town and ceremoniously drag them outside the town boundary. It is done to remove evil spirits, diseases and all sorts of dangers away from every household, quarter and town so that people can live peacefully. Other occasions in Sankhu to appease such invisible dangerous spirits are the days of *bau holegu* on different occasions of the year; the night of Bauyāḥ during the festival of Vajrayoginī; the eighth and ninth nights of Yamlāgā Aṣṭamī and Navamī; the sword procession on the tenth day of Mohanī, and on the night of Sillācarhe.

In his study of the Newar festivals in Kathmandu, Rajendra Pradhan<sup>27</sup> defined them as cosmic rituals and divided them into six different categories:

1. *Parva, utsava (nakhaḥ cakhaḥ)* as feasts and festivals celebrated in honour of some deity or spirit, or which mark seasonal changes that may combine with *jātrā, melā, vrata*, eating special food or by worshipping deities at home or at temples;

2. *Yātrā* (*Jātrā*) or festivals with a procession of deities or human beings along a fixed route inside a city, town or village;
3. *Melā* or fairs centred around a sacred pond or ford (*tīrtha*). Worshippers journey to a sacred spot, bathe, give gifts and worship a deity in the temple;
4. *Tīrth yātrā* pilgrimage to sacred spots;
5. *Vrata* (*dhalaṃdanegu*) or to observe vows and worship the deities, and fasting;
6. *Kathā* (*bākhāṃ*) or the recitation of sacred books.

Although Pradhan defined these festivals and ritual activities recorded in Kathmandu as Hindu rituals, Buddhist Newars too follow most of them in a similar manner. All the festivals and rituals I described for Sankhu can also be placed within Pradhan's six categories. Similarly, Sharma puts Newar festivals into thirteen broad categories. It will also be relevant to mention them here:

1. Family or clan (*kula/phukī*) level festivals, rituals and worships such as the worship of lineage deities, ancestors, quarter Gaṇeśa, Nāsaḥ dyo, divine serpents (*nāga*), spirits, crossroads (*chvāsaḥ*);
2. Fasts and worships observed in the name of different Hindu and Buddhist deities, such as Saptamī *vrata*, Aṣṭamī *vrata*, Ekādaśī *vrata*, Kṛṣṇāṣṭamī, Nāgapañcamī, Śivarātrī;
3. Bathes and pilgrimages such as in Māgh month, Guṃlā Jātrā;
4. Processions of deities on chariots or palanquins;
5. Processions in the cities and towns like the Gāi jātrā, Upāku vanegu, Matayāḥ, throwing of grains (Satavija charne), etc.;
6. Erection of *yasim* poles;
7. Divine dances;
8. Festivals related to pacifying ghosts, spirits, demons and witches such as Gathāṃmugaḥ, Lāke and feeding frog (Byāṃjā nakegu).
9. Festive occasions like Māghe *saṃkrānti* (celebrated on the first day of solar-based month);
10. Festivals linked to seasonal foods like Kvātipunhi, Yomari punhi, Ghyocākusalhu, etc.;
11. Almsgiving ceremonies like Pañcadāna or Samyak;
12. Festivals dedicated to ancestors such as the Mātātīrtha and Gokarṇa Aumṣī, Upāku vanegu and Sāpāru;
13. Religious and social festivals like Mohanī, Svanti, etc.<sup>28</sup>



The festivals we observed in Sankhu can be fitted in one or another category according to these lists easily. In brief, we can say that religious and ritual life in Newar society is highly guided by calendrical festivals. The Newars spend a good part of their time to organise and perform these festivals. As we already discussed in the preceding chapter, a number of *guthi* or socio-ritual associations are active in Sankhu to systematise these ritual activities. Most festivals or ritual celebrations in Sankhu are in one way or another organised by such a *guthi*, which are run either by a group or by an individual.

## Conclusion

It has become clear from our discussions in this chapter that social life in Sankhu is very much determined by religious and ritual activities. Each month, people are busy carrying out one or more religious ritual activities. Each of these acts is intricate and involves its proper social networks and each act carries its own significance and manifold meanings. Therefore, to understand the social life of the town it is necessary to present the activities related to all the feasts and festivals performed in the town. As discussed, most of the festivals and rituals celebrated in Sankhu are also, in a similar or slightly different way, celebrated in other Newar towns and settlements. Therefore, I have avoided describing all of them in detail. In some cases, I have supplied sufficient details so that one can understand a deeper meaning of the festival. However, to treat all the festivals and rituals in a similar detail has not been my purpose. In most cases, I have limited myself to supplying only a brief account of the festivals as they are celebrated in the town. Instead of including the festival of Svanti, in this chapter I have treated in a separate chapter so as to supply a detailed description of all the rituals performed together with an interpretation of their significance.

In this chapter, I have treated all the festivals as briefly as possible. Local particularities of certain festivals I have treated in more detail, such as in the case of Yomaripunhi, Akṣayaṭṛtīyā, Sithinakhah, Gathāmmugah and Pañjārām. Similarly, I have treated Gumphuni, Yaṃlā, Kumārī feeding and Mohanī more elaborately because the ritual activities carried out during these occasions have many local characteristics. The festival of Svanti (Chapter 11) is treated separately because it is important not only as a local festival of Sankhu but also as a national festival for whole Newar society. The month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa (Chapter 12) and the Vajrayoginī festival (Chapter 14) will be treated in separate chapters because both these festivals are celebrated only in Sankhu and they are

considered to be the most important festivals of the town. Also, I am treating the Devī dances in Sankhu in a separate Chapter (Chapter 15), so as to provide a clear picture of a traditional dance, which has its own social network and ritual significance.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

# THE FESTIVAL OF SVANTI: THE RITUAL RENEWAL IN NEPAL

### Introduction

Svanti is one of the national festivals of Nepal celebrated throughout the kingdom by both the Hindu and the Buddhist populations. This festival is known by several names: Svanti, Pañcaka, Yamapañcaka, Tihār and Dipāvalī. Both the words ‘Tihār’ and ‘Dipāvalī’ are derived from the Hindi words ‘Tyauhāra’ and ‘Divālī.’ Svanti, Pañcaka and Yamapañcaka are words of Nepalese origin (Naghabhani 1991:39). The Newar people call the occasion ‘Svanti’ and celebrate it in their own special way. It is called the festival of light, because during this festival people illuminate their houses, streets, quarters, villages, towns and cities with as many lights as possible. On the fourth day of this festival, Newar people celebrate their New Year’s Day. Among the Parvates, performing *bhailo* and *dyausi* (dances with special songs) on the third and fourth day of this festival is a typical tradition. In the evening of Lakṣmī pūjā, unmarried girls who sing and dance *bhailo*, visit their neighbours, where they are given sweet food. The following evening males perform *dyausi*, in a similar manner.

During this festival, Yama, the god of death, is invoked and so it is called ‘Yamapañcaka’ or ‘Five days dedicated to Yama.’ People assume that, during these five days, Yama descends to this world. On the first and second day of this festival, Yama’s messengers, the crow and the dog, are worshipped. On the third day, the cow is worshipped as Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth. The cow is also respected as an animal associated with the realm of Yama. Yama’s assistance is sought in order that recently deceased people may cross the river Baitaraṇī to reach heaven. Honouring Yama and his messenger Yamadut on the day of Mha pūjā and worshipping Yama and his bookkeeper Citragupta on the day of Kijā pūjā clearly mark the relation of this festival to death. On the day of Mha pūjā, Yama is honoured as a protective god, while on the day of Kijā pūjā he is

worshipped as an elder brother and Citragupta as a younger brother (Vajracārya 1988:9-10). Although Yama is invoked on each of the five days during this festival, many people disagree to name this festival “Yamapañcaka” (Naghabhani 1991:47).

The NKNP begin this festival by worshipping Gaṇeśa on the first day, Kachalagā (Kārtik) Dvādaśī, making it a six-day festival (Vajracārya 1988:3). However, in practice, people begin this festival on Trayodaśī by worshipping the crow and they consider it a five-days’ festival.<sup>1</sup> The manner of worship now popular among the Newars in Sankhu is:

Kva pūjā (first day): worship of crows, messengers (of Death)

Khicā pūjā (second day): worship of dogs

Sā pūjā and Lakṣmī pūjā (third day): the worship of cows and Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth

Mha pūjā (fourth day): the worship of the self, the start of the New Year

Kijā pūjā (fifth day): the worship of brothers by their sisters

## Svanti and its rituals

### ***Kva pūjā (first day): worship of crows, the messengers (of Death)***

On the first day of Yamapañcaka, people in Sankhu worship and feed crows, which are numerous in the town. In Newar households, it is common to offer a portion of food to crows every morning before its members eat their own meal. Crows are believed to be messengers, carrying messages of close relatives and friends from far-away places. The crows deliver these messages while cawing. Depending on the voice of that crow, people guess whether it is delivering a good or a bad message. When it caws near the house with a sweet voice, this is taken as a good message. Sometimes the cawing is also taken as an announcement of the imminent arrival of some guest. However, if the sound is harsh, then it is supposed to be an indication of something bad going to happen. The crow is also supposed to be the messenger of Yama, the god of death. People believe that, when somebody dies, the departed soul (*preta*) finds its temporary shelter in a crow. At least for the first ten days of the impure period after death, the departed soul is supposed to reside in a crow. Every morning during the first ten-day’s mourning period, the chief mourner has to perform *śrāddha* by offering a rice ball (*piṇḍa*) and food stuffs to crows in the name of the deceased person.

### ***Khicā pūjā (second day): Worship of dogs***

The second day of the Svanti festival is Khicā pūjā, the day of worshipping dogs. This day is dedicated to please the dogs. Not only pet dogs, even wandering stray dogs are respected and worshipped with garlands and delicacies. In Sankhu, keeping dogs as pet animals is very common and there are many stray dogs too. On this day, from early in the morning, people are seen worshipping dogs in the streets. The dogs are considered to be the guards at the doors of Yama's place and people believe that their worship helps the soul's passage at the time of death. Like crows, dogs are supposed to be an abode for the recently deceased. The chief mourner performs *śrāddha* to offer *piṇḍa* and foodstuffs to dogs in the name of the deceased during the first ten days after somebody's death, just like he does to crows. Even when stray dogs enter the house of a deceased person, they are not chased away, because people believe that it is the dead person visiting his or her house, disguised as a dog. Dogs are also regarded as the vehicle of the fearful god Bhairava and of Nāsaḥ dyo (Nātyaśvara), the god of dance and music. They are also the gatekeepers of different temples in the Kathmandu Valley.

### ***Sā pūjā: The worship of cows as Lakṣmī and Lakṣmī pūjā (third day)***

*Sā* or cow is considered to be a representation of Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth. On the third day of the festival of Svanti, the cow is worshipped and fed generously. Today, only a few families in Sankhu keep a cow at home, so those who do not have one visit a place where a cow can be found or they request to bring a cow to their house for a *pūjā*. People believe that the worship brings them good fortune. They attach sacred threads, which they had received from Brahmins on the day of Janaipurnimā to the tail of a cow<sup>2</sup> and believe that this act enables them to receive the cow's support in crossing the river Baitaraṇī, which is said to create frightful barriers to sinful men and women. To give a cow as a gift to Brahmins is a religious task for Hindus that enables them to reach heaven after their death. For them, the cow is the most sacred animal and her five products; milk, curd, butter, urine and dung are considered to be pure.

On the evening of the same day, after people worship the cow, they worship Lakṣmī, the goddess of wealth. For this occasion, houses are cleaned and decorated with lights to receive her. Lakṣmī is represented by the word 'Śrī' which means the sum of beauty and betterment. Since the

ancient times, the meaning and interpretation of Lakṣmī is vast and wide. Eight (*aṣṭalakṣmī*) or sixteen (*ṣoḍśalakṣmī*) names are invoked to please her during her worship.<sup>3</sup> Traditional painters provide a special water colour painting of Lakṣmī: she has four hands; one of her right hands carries a mirror (*jvalānhāykaṃ*) and the other is in fearlessness posture (*abhaya mudrā*); one of her left hands is carrying a vermilion container (*sinhaṃmhu*) and the other is in blessing posture (*bara mudrā*); she is seated on her throne, adorned with glittering dresses and ornaments on her body, wearing a golden crown on her head; her right foot is touching a tortoise and the left one is in *padmāsana mudrā*; two Kubera (god of wealth) and two benevolent ghosts (*khyāḥ*) are represented in front of her.<sup>4</sup>



Plate 25 A girl is smearing the door of her house with cow dung mixed with red clay diluted with water to welcome the goddess Lakṣmī (October 1991).

In Sankhu, the preparation for the worship of Lakṣmī begins early in the morning in every household by smearing every floor with cow dung mixed with red clay diluted with water. A line of cow dung and red clay leads from the front of the house into the secret shrine of Lakṣmī. This is to let the goddess Lakṣmī find her way to the place of worship so that she may bestow wealth on the member of the household. They also garland the doors of the houses and paint them with coloured powders (*sinham*), especially the shops.

In Sankhu, those who own a shop that is not part of their house, worship Lakṣmī at their shop first, then join their family to worship Lakṣmī at home. As soon as the sun sets, every family begins to decorate each door and window of their house with lamps, shallow earthen bowls with cooking oil and a wick (*pālācā*). Two to three decades ago, people began replacing the traditional *pālācā* with candles. Today, many families also decorate their houses with coloured electric bulbs.

In every house, the statue of Lakṣmī is kept in a secret place called *āgaṃ*. All the family members must join the worship. The eldest male member (*nāyo*) of the family is in charge of the ritual proceedings, while women are responsible for preparing *pūjā* plates and cleaning the house. Ritual ingredients are generally red and yellow powders, incenses, rice, popped rice, threads (*jajaṃkā*), yoghurt, flowers, seasonal fruit, sweets and other foodstuffs. A painting of Lakṣmī painted by a traditional painter (Pum) is used to represent the goddess in the secret room. Old and new coins, money, gold, silver and all the treasures of the house are exhibited. At least one new coin must be offered to Lakṣmī or added to the stores. New utensils, new grains (paddy, rice, and wheat), weight and measures are also ritually treated. Offering grains from the new harvest to Lakṣmī is an essential ritual on this occasion, because people must offer the cereals to her before they consume it themselves. They believe that Lakṣmī is the goddess of grains whose benediction is necessary to gain good crops. The main reason for honouring Lakṣmī is to receive her blessing to increase one's wealth and prosperity. People in fact worship her every day: they believe that this worship brings them great fortune.

After the ritual, follows the family feasts. Dried meat (*sukulā*) of various animals, kept from the festival of Mohanī two weeks earlier, is eaten, after it is first offered to the goddess. For three nights, Lakṣmī's presence is assured by keeping her in the same place and she is worshipped every day. Then, the day after Kijā pūjā or on the morning of the fourth day is the day of bringing out blessings (*svām kokāyegu*) of Lakṣmī from the secret room to distribute among the family members.

Gambling, which is legally forbidden during other times of the years starts from the day of Lakṣmī pūjā and lasts for three days and three nights. People believe that gambling is auspicious during Svanti, and might bring them good fortune. Most places of singing devotional songs (*bhajan*) in Sankhu are turned into public gambling dens on this occasion.

***Mha pūjā (fourth day): worship of the self, start of the New Year***

Mha pūjā is one of the oldest traditions of Nepal. It is older than that of the Nepal era (Nepal Saṃvat) itself. Bhuvanlal Pradhan assumes that one of the Licchavi kings, most probably Mānadeva I (464-505 AD), started this festival (Pradhan 1998:38 and Shrestha 1982). Paying off all the debts of the Nepalese, a generous trader called Saṃkhadhar Sākhvāla began the Nepal Saṃvat on the 20th October 879 AD, during the reign of king Rāghavadeva.<sup>5</sup> It so happened that the Nepal Saṃvat was introduced on the day of Mha pūjā. Malla rulers in the Valley of Nepal officially continued the calendar of the era till their rule ended in 1769. In 1769 AD, after the Gorkhā conquest of Nepal, the Shah rulers started to use Śaka Saṃvat, which in 1903 AD was replaced by Vikram Saṃvat by the Rana Prime minister Candra Shamser.<sup>6</sup> The use of Nepal Saṃvat never completely died out. Since the 1950s, the Newar elite started to celebrate the New Year's Day of the Nepal era as a public event.<sup>7</sup> Since it is called Nepal Saṃvat, they demanded that it be recognised as a national calendar era. As this demand came from the Newars, it began to be labelled the Nevāri Saṃvat by many non-Newar people. Recently, in 1999, Saṃkhadhar Sākhvāla, the founder of the Nepal Saṃvat was officially declared a national hero of Nepal by the Nepalese government.

On New Year's Day, Mha pūjā is celebrated in a grand way. On this day, people in Sankhu perform Mha pūjā to all the deities located in their neighbourhood before they perform the "worship of the Self" (Mha pūjā) in their houses. Usually, Mha pūjā is performed in the evening on the top floor of the house. The floor is cleaned and smeared with cow dung and red clay. Then a *mandah* (*mandala*), a cosmic circle of flour, is drawn for each person. *Mandala* are also drawn for those members of the family who are absent and for the guests who are present on the occasion. They also draw some *mandala* in the name of the three hundred thirty million deities (*tetisakoṭī dyo*), of Yama, of his messenger (Yamadut) and of Śiva's messenger (Śivadut); and for household items such as broom, winnow, grinding stone, pestle, mortar, measuring pot (*mānā* and *pāthi*), water container (*karuvā*), and earthen pitcher.<sup>8</sup> I observed the Mha pūjā ceremony in my own family and in a Jyāpu family in Sankhu. In both



cases, steamed rice-flour figures of Yama, his messenger, Gaṇeśa, Lakṣmī, Kubera and Balirāja were displayed. In the centre of each *mandala*, a small oil *mandala* is drawn. Then, red powder, flowers, popped and husked rice are showered over the *mandala*. A small and special kind of rice pastry (*lvahacāmari*), walnuts, incense, chestnuts, wild lime, common citron (*taḥsi*), citrus fruit (*bhvagatyā*), threads (*jajaṃkā*), flower garlands and long wicks (*kheluitā*) are placed around a *mandala* to be handed over to the person sitting in front of it. As far as possible, all the members of the family sit in a single row in front of the *mandala*, facing east. Facing south is believed to be inauspicious.

In my own (Śreṣṭha) family, the eldest male member (*nāyo*) of the house sits at the head of the row; then, his male juniors, unmarried daughters and other women are seated according to seniority. In the Jyāpu family, I observed that the eldest woman representing the deceased head of the family sat at the head of the row as the head of the family, then her juniors according to seniority. To consider the eldest women as the head of the family even when their adult sons are present, is a significant difference between Śreṣṭha and Jyāpu families. The *nāyo* worship a small lamp containing a figure of Gaṇeśa (*sukundā*) before he begins other ritual activities.<sup>9</sup> All other members of the family also throw a few grains of rice to Gaṇeśa in a gesture of worship.

Then the eldest woman (*nakim*) of the house puts a *ṭikā* on everybody's forehead; other elder women assist her in handing over the *kheluitā*, *jajaṃkā* and fruits. The person who is thus blessed throws a few grains of rice over these objects. Everybody must light his or her *kheluitā* and place it on his own *mandala*. This act can be seen as the actual moment of worshipping the self. The eldest woman pours worship items on the *mandala* of each person, and then she also pours them three times over the body of each person. This is to wish the person worshipped health, happiness and prosperity. Then fruit, threads and garlands are handed over. Towards the end of the ceremony, the persons worshipped are given *sagam*, a ritual blessing which is composed of a boiled, peeled and fried egg, a fish, pieces of boiled meat and bread made of lentil (*va*) together with liquor to wish them happy and prosperous days ahead. Before the ritual ends, pieces of *taḥsi* and other fruit are eaten.

Walnuts, *taḥsi*, *kheluitā* and *mandala* are the crucial items of the ceremony. The *mandala* represents the person worshipped, the *kheluitā* his life, the *taḥsi* his purity and the walnut his strength. It is necessary to keep *kheluitā* lighted until the worship is finished. It is considered a bad sign if it extinguishes during the ritual, because people link the light with a person's longevity.<sup>10</sup> The Mha pūjā ceremony ends by sweeping the

decorated *mandala* from the bottom to the top of the row and from the top to the bottom. After sweeping the *mandala*, the ceremony concludes, and a family feast then starts marking the actual end of the celebration of Mha pūjā.

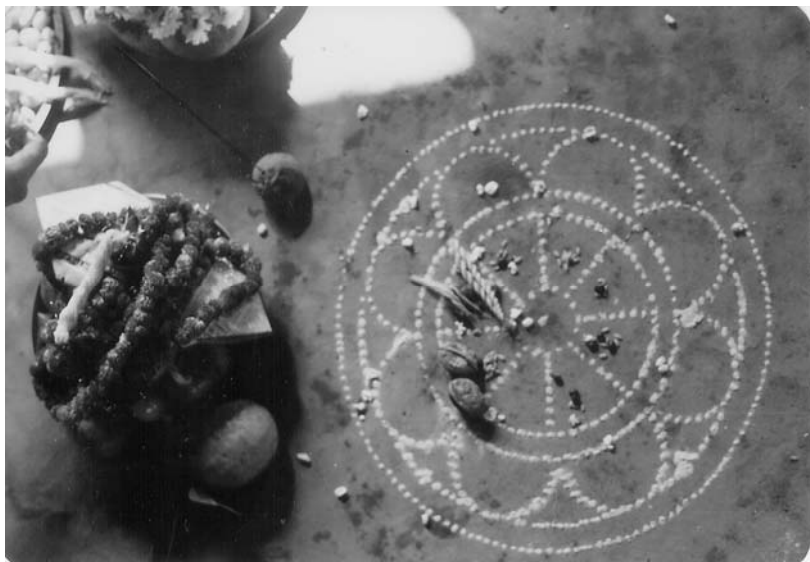


Plate 26 *Mandala*, a cosmic circle, is drawn for each person during the Mha pūjā (worship of the self, October 1991).

By celebrating Mha pūjā, people anticipate a successful and prosperous life during the coming year. The worship is also supposed to provide people with good health and a long life (Munakarmi 1975:60). The way of celebrating this festival may vary in some details from one family to another, but the significance of the celebration is similarly understood. Like in all other Newar festivals, women play a major role in arranging the necessary items for the ritual. In my family, they also take the responsibility of worshipping all the male members of the family, while male members usually do not reciprocate such tasks. If a person is living alone he must perform his Mha pūjā by himself. In such a case, this can be considered a real worship of the self. Worship of the self means to recognise God in oneself. The celebration of Mha pūjā indicates that the one who realises his capacities may turn himself into a god. To be a god means to be able to sacrifice oneself for the well being of others.

According to Baldev Juju, a Newar culture specialist, the ultimate aim of a person is to attain the level of a god.<sup>11</sup>



Plate 27 The worship of the self (Mha pūjā), important for men, women and children alike (October 1990).

During the Mha pūjā, the charitable demon king Balirāj is also worshipped (Naghabhani 1991:44-45). A myth tells that he was pushed into the netherworld (*pātāla*) by the god Viṣṇu to prevent him from conquering heaven. By the power of his vow that he would give gifts, Balirāj was about to conquer heaven. This alarmed all the gods, so one day the disguised Viṣṇu arrived at Balirāj's door as a saint and begged some space to make three steps. Generously, Balirāj granted the disguised Viṣṇu permission to step wherever he wanted. Viṣṇu used this opportunity to deceive Balirāj. Viṣṇu covered the whole heaven with his first step and the earth by his second step, so Balirāj had nothing left than his own head for Viṣṇu's third step, which enabled Viṣṇu to push Balirāj down to the netherworld with his feet. However, after this unpleasant deceit, Viṣṇu asked Balirāj if he had any wishes. Balirāja now requested permission to visit his kingdom once a year to see his people. Viṣṇu granted him the day of Mha pūjā as his day on earth. The myth tells that the joyous celebration of Mha pūjā is to assure king Balirāj that his people are living happily in his country. Although the demon king Balirāj is respected in Nepal during

the festival of Svanti many people do not agree that Nepal is Balirāj's ancient kingdom. K.B. Uday (2000: 2) believes that the worship of Balirāj is a tradition, which has its origin in India.

On the day of Mha pūjā, the Parvate people in Nepal worship the ox and "mountain of the cowdung" (*gobardhan parvat*). According to local myth, Lord Krishna began this tradition to commemorate the day he created a mountain of cowdung to protect the Braja people of Gokula from god Indra's attack.

### ***Kijā pūjā (fifth day): worship of brothers***

This is the final day of the five days' observance of the Yamapañcaka or Svanti festival. On this day, sisters worship their brothers to bring them health, happiness and prosperity. This festival is celebrated in Nepal, not only by the Newars, but also by the Parvates and the people of the Tarāi. Among the Newars, this day is known as the day of Kijā pūjā, while the Parvates call it Bhāitika. For most Newars, it is the occasion to worship both younger and elder brothers, but for many others it is the day to worship only their younger brothers. On this day, married sisters return to their parental homes to worship their brothers, or brothers visit their sisters to receive worship from them. The reigning king also observes this festival by receiving *tikā* from his sisters. Every year, a royal astrologer announces the most auspicious moment to receive *tikā* from sisters, but apart from the king, people choose their own convenient time worship.

On the day of Kijā pūjā, together with brothers, Yama and Citragupta are worshipped. So *mandala* are drawn for them too.<sup>12</sup> In my own family, on the day of Mha pūjā, these *mandala* are placed on the top of the row, but on the day of Kijā pūjā they are placed at the bottom while in the Jyāpu family I observed, their position did not change.<sup>13</sup> Most ingredients used at Kijā pūjā are similar to those at Mha pūjā, such as drawing of an *mandala*, and worshiping objects mentioned above. The way of sisters' worship of brothers is also similar to Mha pūjā, but this time the actors are sisters. The most important items of the day are oil *mandala*, walnuts, *taḥsi* and *gvaysvām* (a small nut-shaped flower).

Explaining *ślokas* from *Satkarma Ratnāvalī* and a traditional calendar (*pātro*), Naghabhani states that the worship of brothers by their sisters on this day is a tradition derived from the legendary worship of Yama by his younger sister Yamunā. He thinks it is wrong to call the day 'Kijā pūjā' or 'worship of the younger brother' because the texts do not specify this aspect of brotherhood. He thinks it would be more appropriate to worship both younger and elder brothers (Naghabhani 1991:46 and Upadhyay

1996:225-231). Yamunā is also identified with Yamī. According to a Hindu myth, Yama and Yamī are the twin son and daughter of Vivasvat (the sun) and Saranyū. Yamī tried to persuade Yama to marry her, but Yama refused the proposal of an incestuous marriage, as he was afraid of being called evil (O' Flaherty 1978:64). Another myth tells that on this day a sister was preparing to worship her brother, but Yama, the god of death arrived to take him away because his life span on earth ran out. The clever sister persuaded Yama to wait and witness the worship. She worshipped Yama together with her brother, which moved Yama. Consequently, Yama saved her brother's life. This myth tells that she requested Yama not to take away her brother until the oil *mandala* dried up and *gvaysvām* faded away. People believe that a *mandala* made from oil never dries up; so nut-shaped flower (*gvaysvām*) never fades away, and Yama had to give up the idea of taking her brother away. It is believed that from that time onwards sisters began worshipping their brothers on this day believing that it will bestow a long life on them. The myth makes it clear that people assume it is possible to conquer death by worshipping Yama, the god of death. Hence, this occasion can be taken as a celebration of the victory of life over death.



Plate 28 The ceremony of Kijā pūjā (sisters worshipping brothers, October 1991).

Brothers and sisters are also meant to exchange gifts on that day of Kijā pūjā. Not only do sisters worship their brothers and bless them with happiness and long life, but they also offer them with delicious foods, sweets, fruits, walnuts, chestnuts, betel nuts, pistachio nuts, cashew nuts, almonds, raisins, cinnamon, chocolates and cloves (*masalā pva*). In return, brothers give money or clothes or other items to their sisters.

The end of the “worship of brothers” is considered to be the end of the five-day long Svanti festival. The real closure of the festival however takes place on the day following Kijā pūjā. On this day, the final worship of Lakṣmī is performed early in the morning and the *prasād* of Lakṣmī are taken out from the *āgam* to be distributed among the family members. The blessings include flowers, *ṭikā*, sweets, fruits and a feast. Married daughters and sisters are also invited to receive the blessings and to attend the feast.

### Significance of the rituals

Pañcaka is a Sanskrit name given to this festival, which means ‘consisting of five’ (Monier Williams 1988:578). To call this festival ‘Pañcaka’ seems appropriate since it is celebrated over five consecutive days. ‘Pañcaka’ is also generally considered an inauspicious period, which may occur twelve to thirteen times a year.<sup>14</sup> Auspicious tasks like sowing the fields are avoided during such a period. It is considered dangerous when a member of a family dies during any of the days of the Pañcaka. People believe that in such cases as much as five members from the same family will die consecutively. To avoid such a disaster, adequate attention is given when somebody dies during a Pañcaka period: during the cremation of the dead body, eggs are added to the corpse as a sacrificial substitute to human lives.

As the god of death, Yama is accountable for determining the moment of death of all the creatures in this world. Therefore, Yama’s predominance during the Pañcaka festival is clear. In this regard the festival’s name ‘Yamapañcaka’ or ‘Five days dedicated to Yama’ is significant. Pañcaka as a festival is considered a good period but, because of Yama’s presence, it is not without danger. The chief deity of this festival does not have any processions, but Yama’s presence from the first day of the festival to the end is prominent. To celebrate a festival in the presence of Yama (the god of death), can be risky. Therefore, this festival may have been taken as an opportunity for people to appease Yama so that they receive his bliss. By worshipping Yama, people solicit his grant of a long life in this world and in heaven after death. Hindus believe that, as

soon as one dies, one's departed soul moves to Yama's court, where all souls are judged and they either are awarded heaven or they are sent to hell. It should be remembered that to worship and appease deceased ancestors (*pitr*) is a dominant feature of Newar rituals. Every morning, sons must offer water and food to their deceased ancestors. During all major and minor festivals, the ancestors are presented food (*jugibvaḥ*), and they are also invoked during any special family ceremony like marriage or other lifecycle rituals. *Śrāddha* is performed once a year to worship and offer food to them. Therefore, the worship of Yama, the god of death, during the Svanti festival is just another occasion of appeasing Yama who might otherwise cause untimely death or trouble.

However, as it is now, the main focus of the festival is not Yama, but Lakṣmī, the worship of the self and the worship of brothers. Although people celebrate this festival for five days, they consider these three days as important and celebrate with pomp. Scholars agree that the Newar name 'Svanti' for this festival is derived from the words '*Svanhu Tithi*' or 'Three-day festival.' On the third day of the festival, the worship of Lakṣmī is celebrated with great fanfare. Although social life in Newar society is principally represented in a religious and spiritual way, material prosperity and happiness are recognised as essential elements for social continuity.

The worship of Lakṣmī and the worship of brothers are not an unimportant part of this festival, but the Newars take Mha pūjā or the "worship of the self" as the most important event of the festival. Mha pūjā is only prevalent among the Newars. In many respects, Mha pūjā can be considered a unique Nepalese tradition. Worship of the self or worship of one's body (*mha*) and soul (*ātmā*) is Mha pūjā. For religiously observant people, body and soul are two different phenomena. The body is temporal, while the soul is immortal. In every person resides a god, so the worship of the self is an occasion to respect or recognise the god in oneself. The Nepalese tradition of worshipping gods and goddesses is to invoke their power (*śakti*) Juju (1985:67). Hence, the "worship of the self" is to understand one's capability and to utilise it for attaining the level of a god or goddess and as such to work for the betterment of human beings and the whole universe.

The fifth day's worship of brothers is important from other angles too. This tradition is one of the most popular customs in South Asia. It is not only religiously meaningful but also significant from a social point of view, because it plays a great role in strengthening the relation between brothers and sisters. A balanced relation between brothers and sisters is one of the essential aspects of Nepalese social life. If not handled

thoughtfully the bond between siblings may turn very unpleasant. In such a situation one may lose one's dignity in society. The day of Kijā pūjā provides brothers and sisters an opportunity to up-keep their relationship.

Of course, one of the most important aspects of this festival is the turn of the lunar year. It is clear from our earlier discussions that celebrating of the turn of the year on this day, Mha pūjā, is an ancient tradition in Nepal. Therefore, it is appropriate to call this occasion the turn of the ritual year, because apart from two festivals (Ghyocākusalhu and Bisket jātrā<sup>15</sup>), all the feasts and festivals in Nepal are celebrated according to the lunar calendar. In India too, those who follow the Kārtikādi lunar calendar take this occasion to be the turn of the ritual year and celebrate it as their New Year's Day. As Tyauhār or Divālī, this is a widely celebrated festival among the Hindus in India and elsewhere. It could be assumed that the tradition of celebrating of the New Year may, over the years, have created the wonderful festival of Svanti or Yamapañcaka. Although Mha pūjā was came into use earlier, the celebration of the New Year and Mha pūjā is itself a 1132 year old tradition. 'Nepal' is now the name of the present-day country. Hence it will be erroneous to call the Nepal era a Newar or Newari Saṃvat. There is no reason that only the Newars should feel proud of the Nepal era, because as the name 'Nepal' suggests it belongs to all Nepalese. It is notable that the Government of Nepal recognised Nepal era as a national era in 2008, and in 2011 the Government affirmed implementing it as national calendar.

## Conclusion

The Svanti festival contains five major components: the worship of crow, dog and cow, the invocation of Yama by worshipping his messengers and himself, the worship of Lakṣmī, the worship of the self on New Year's day, and the worship of brothers. The necessity of combining these five different ritual activities in one single festival is difficult to explain. The most obvious feature of this festival is the presence of Yama. However, if we consider this the festival of Yama only, then the worship of Lakṣmī, the self and brothers cannot logically be fitted in. Crow, dog and cow are in one way or the other related to Yama and his realm, therefore their worship during this festival makes sense, but Yama's worship together with the self and brothers is difficult to comprehend. The relation between two ritual sequels, the worship of the self and the worship of brothers, is not clear to me either. Although the nature of worship during these two days is similar, the actors who carry out the rituals are different; so the meanings of each ritual are different too. Why the worship of the self and



brothers occurs after the worship of Lakṣmī is not easy to understand either.

Yama is invoked throughout the festival but his absence at the time of Lakṣmī's worship is a puzzle. The reason may be that people prefer avoiding associations of death when they are engaged in worshipping wealth or are otherwise busy with material life.

Since people are busy honouring Yama from the first to the final day, this festival can more appropriately be called the celebration of Yama. In this regard, the name 'Yamapañcaka' is a most suitable name for this festival. Yama as the god of death is considered to be a less compassionate divinity. People know that death is inevitable but they like to avoid it as far as possible. It is clear that the real motive behind the invocation of Yama at the time of the New Year's celebration or the "worship of the self" is to plead for the continuation of life for another year. Similarly, the worship of Yama together with the worship of brothers is also thought to obtain his blessings for the good health and life of brothers. These two events can be considered the celebration of life, albeit with the mercy of Yama, the god of death. By worshipping him, people try to subjugate the power of death. It is significant that Mha pūjā is performed as the first ritual of the New Year and that people pray for health, long life, happiness and prosperity in the coming year. Yama's worship on such an occasion is meaningful, because he is the god who possesses the power of determining people's life span in the world and their fate after death. Yama's acceptance of being worshipped as a protective god during this festival can be taken as his willingness to show his compassion towards human beings. Compassion towards human beings shown by the god of death may be called the defeat of death. In this regard, the "worship of the self" and the "worship of brothers" can both be considered as the overcoming of death. Hence we can consider the festival of Svanti as the celebration of the victory of life over death.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

# THE FAST OF MĀDHAV NĀRĀYAṆA AND THE LEGEND OF SVASTHĀNĪ

### Introduction

Every year on the full-moon day of Milā punhi, the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival in Sankhu begins. It is a religious fast (*vrata*) dedicated to the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, a manifestation of the Hindu god Viṣṇu. To observe this fast many religious women and men from various Newar settlements assemble on the banks of the river Śālinadī near Sankhu. To participate in this religious fast is called *dhalaṃ danegu* or *vrata cvanegu* and the participants of the fast are called *dhalaṃdaṃpiṃ* or *vratālu*. It is an exclusively Hindu festival observed mainly by the high caste Newars in Sankhu. In this fast, Buddhist castes like the Vajrācārya, the Śākya and the Sāymi do not participate, while lower ones from whose hands water is accepted like the Duiṃ, the Nau, the Kau, the Bhā, the Chipā, the Puṃ and the Gathu castes are not allowed to participate in the *vrata*. The so-called unclean or those castes from whose hands water is not accepted by the upper castes like the Nāy, the Jogi, the Doṃ and the Po, are prohibited from participating. Similarly, people from other communities such as the Parvates and Tāmāṅ are not encouraged to participate. But if any of them want to participate in this *vrata* in Sankhu they may do so provided they keep themselves apart from the other participants at the time of performing *dhalaṃdanegu*, the main daily ritual. Such restrictions have now been relaxed to a certain extent, but not completely. In 2000, I saw that 23 women and men attended the *vrata* from the Parvate community and two from the Duiṃ caste. At the beginning they performed their daily rituals sitting together with others, but later they had to take their seats in a rest place situated away from the temple courtyard. They did this only after a woman participant from Bhaktapur, who claimed to be possessed by the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, complained about their presence in the main group.

No written documents are available to date the exact beginning of the tradition of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival in the town of Sankhu, but it can be speculated that it is a no less than four hundred year old tradition in Sankhu.<sup>1</sup> This assumption is based on oral sayings and a note found in the ritual manual of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* called ‘Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Pratisthā Pūjā’ (MPP-I). This tells that Śrī Gaṃgā Rānī or Queen Gaṃgā established the Māgha *vrata*. Queen Gaṃgā came to rule Sankhu from Bhaktapur together with the king Tribhuvan Malla Deva in AD 1560. Since we do not encounter other queens named Gaṃgā in the history of Sankhu, it will be appropriate to consider her as the same as the one mentioned in the MPP-I, who established the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *Vrata*. If this is true, we may conclude that the tradition of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* in Sankhu is at least 440 years old.<sup>2</sup>

In 1986 a similar *vrata* of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa was initiated in Bhaktapur on the banks of the river Hanumānaghāt. According to the priest and the participants in Bhaktapur, they resumed this festival after a long break. They claimed that they had an older tradition of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* than in Sankhu, but had abandoned it a long time ago.<sup>3</sup> The way of celebrating the festival in Sankhu is different and attracts many outsiders every year, while the Bhaktapur one is less known to outsiders and is attended by a small number of women from Bhaktapur only. In 2000, the number of participants in the fast in Bhaktapur was eighteen and all were women.

Nowadays people believe that the festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa has an intimate connection with Svasthānī, a legendary story that is recited in every household during this month. For this reason, those people who take the *vrata* of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa believe that they are taking the *vrata* of Svasthānī. The simultaneous recitation of Svasthānī together with the ritual of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa on the banks of the river Śālinadī and active listening to or recitation of it by the participants provides an intrinsic view of these two rituals. Today most people also think that the collective *vrata* observed on the banks of the Śālinadī amounts to the *vrata* of Svasthānī and Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. People also observe the *vrata* of Svasthānī individually at their own homes, and anybody may do this.

Following the sacred legend of Svasthānī, people have begun to identify Sankhu as Lāvaṇya *desa*, the kingdom of a Brahmin king Navarāja and his queen Candrāvati described in the legend of Svasthānī. In the month of the fast, apart from the mass of devotees (*vrataḷu*) residing in the vicinity of the Śālinadī, thousands of pilgrims from all over the country pour into Sankhu, making it the busiest month for the town. In 2000, a group of Hindu enthusiasts began fund raising activities to erect a temple

of the goddess Svasthānī very close to the spot in Śālinadī where the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* takes place, identifying both Svasthānī and Mādhav Nārāyaṇa as the same god. However, many people in Sankhu, including the Rājopādhyāy Brahmin priests, who perform priestly tasks during the observance of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival, disapprove of the idea of erecting the temple because they disagree with linking Mādhav Nārāyaṇa with Svasthānī.<sup>4</sup> They take the view that the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa fast (*vrata*) has nothing to do with Svasthānī. They say that the month-long recitation of Svasthānī is a later invention. However, most participants in the *vrata* in Sankhu hardly distinguish between the two. So far, the ritual text used for the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* at Śālinadī is completely different from the ritual prescribed in the text of Svasthānī for the *vrata*, but the participants worship the book of Svasthānī and read its stories every day as an essential part of the *vrata*.

The Rājopādhyāy priests claim that the month-long fast of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is observed as a Vaiṣṇav tradition. They worship one form of Viṣṇu each month, so Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is invoked in the month of Māgha. The gilded bronze statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, whose presence is essential for performing rituals at Śālinadī, is clearly a Viṣṇu. Monier Williams' dictionary states that Mādhava is one of the names of Kṛṣṇa or Viṣṇu. It also lists it as one of the names of Śiva (Monier Williams 1988:808). A myth says that the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa was from Pharping and the people of Sankhu stole it from there, and that it was originally made of sandal wood. Later, as the old statue decayed, a metal statue replaced it. The present bronze statue is about thirty centimetres tall, and it weighs about two kilograms. A gilded inscription plate attached to the back of its frame tells that the statue was offered by a person from Bāgatumthi, Calākhu quarter, Sankhu in AD 1876 (996 NS Mārgaśira 6 Wednesday). The text used for the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* does not indicate any deity like Svasthānī, while the instruction text for Svasthānī *vrata* clearly mentions a unique deity Svasthānī. The first Newar Svasthānī text makes it clear that the god Śiva created the unique *vrata* of Svasthānī at the request of his wife Pārvatī. Creating the *vrata*, Śiva clearly states that the deities to be worshipped during the *vrata* are none other than Śiva and Pārvatī themselves.<sup>5</sup> A god half Śiva and half Pārvatī is more popularly known among the Hindus as Umāmaheśvara and Ardhanārīśvara. In the first Newar Svasthānī, Svasthānī is presented as Jagadīśvarī or the mother of the gods. It is stated that her face is gold-coloured with three eyes and that she has four hands and is seated on a lion; one of her right hands is holding a sword and another is in the *varada mudrā*. One of her left hands is holding a shield and another blue lotus.<sup>6</sup>

However, in the present day Svasthānī she may be depicted in many different ways. In 2000, during the festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in Sankhu, a local painter, Bhupendra Shrestha of Sankhu was distributing a coloured painting of the goddess Svasthānī seated on a lotus, the goddess is surrounded by eight mother goddesses (*aṣṭamātrka*). One of her right hands is holding a trident and another is holding a sword, while one of her left hands is holding a wheel and another is holding a blue lotus. Gaṇeśa, Kumār, Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī are placed at the four corners, while two fairies (*apsarā*) are flying at the top with a garland in their hands.

Our discussions below will make it clear that Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and Svasthānī are two different deities and that the observation of their *vrata* is also different in many ways.

### The legend of Svasthānī

The Svasthānī is a Hindu myth of Nepalese origin, which contains the story of a Brahmin boy Navarāja being crowned as a king of Lāvanya desa. He was made king because of the merit his mother had gained from the observance of the month-long *vrata* of the Svasthānī. The oldest text containing the Svasthānī legend, dated AD 1573, exclusively contains the story of Gvamayju and his son Navarāja written in Sanskrit in only 148 *ślokas*, and is the shortest version found to date.<sup>7</sup> In AD 1603, the first Newar version of the legend appeared, and this is a free translation of the original Sanskrit text with a special flavour from the translator (SV). The first translation of it found in Khas-Nepali is dated AD 1810. Svasthānī dramas are also found in Maithili and Hindi, but the tradition of its recitation is common mainly among the Newars and the Parvate Hindus. It is the most widely copied Hindu text and is recited by these two groups in Nepal. The Nepal German Manuscript Preservation Project has microfilmed a total of 626 different versions of Svasthānī manuscripts from individuals (1970-1990), and had to stop because of its great numbers (Tamot 1991:5). The first printed version of the Svasthānī appeared in AD 1889. Linda Iltis made an extensive study of the legend of Svasthānī and its *vrata* from a woman's perspective. She has translated one of the versions of Svasthānī from Newar into English. Iltis has taken both the Svasthānī *vrata* and the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* as one (Iltis 1985 and 1996:304-320). In her book, Mary Anderson includes the Svasthānī *vrata*, but without distinguishing it from Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata*, and presents Mādhav Nārāyaṇa not only as Mahādeva-Nārāyaṇa but also as Hari-Har.<sup>8</sup> Svasthānī began to absorb stories and myths from the Śkaṇḍapurāṇa, the Padmapurāṇa, the Śivapurāṇa and the Liṅgapurāṇa.

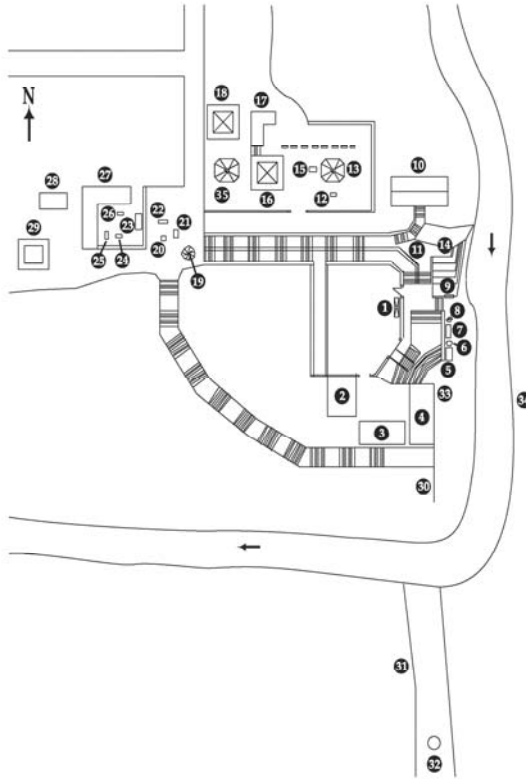
Svasthānī, as it is now popular among the Nepalese, contains three major parts: the first part deals with the formation of the universe by killing the demon Madhukaitava, the second part deals with stories related to Śiva-Satyadevī and Pārvaṭī, while in the third part the story of Gomayju and his son Navarāj is told. These Svasthānī have swollen from less than one hundred pages to more than four hundred pages. The most interesting aspect of the Svasthānī legend is the incorporation of many deities and temples found across the Nepal Valley into its stories. Some of the Svasthānī also began to include Buddhist stories, presenting Śākyamunī as its main character (Iltis 1985:46-49).

In spite of the difference between Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and Svasthānī, both *vrata* are observed in the same month. It is likely that because of this coincidence, people began to regard them as one. In 2004, as an innovation, some devotees in Sankhu have erected an artistic pagoda temple to the goddess Svasthānī, despite some criticised it, as they consider it would diminish the importance of Mādhavanārāyaṇ. In the following sections I will concentrate mainly on rituals connected to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* practised in Sankhu.

### Physical features of Śālinadī, where the Mādhavnārāyaṇa *vrata* takes place

The religious site of Nāri or Śālinadī, where the Mādhavnārāyaṇa *vrata* takes place is located to the east of the town, at a distance of about eight hundred metres. Other than the temple of Vajrayoginī Sankhu is famous for the river Śālinadī, as it is described in the mythical story of Svasthānī as one of the holiest places on earth. Every year in January and February, devotees from all over Nepal visit this place to take holy baths in the Śālinadī River and to pay respect (*darśana*) to Mādhavanārāyaṇ. Every year, hundreds of Newar men and women from Sankhu and other places gather here for the month-long fast of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in January and February.

The western bank of the river Śālinadī is decorated with stone steps enabling devotees to reach the river. Every year, however, during the monsoon, the stone steps are covered with sand, so pious local people voluntarily gather to clean away the sand before the festival begins. On the banks of this river, there are also a number of stone images of different Hindu deities. They are Gaṇeśa, Jalaṇārāyaṇ, Bāsuki nāga, Mahādeva, Satyanārāyaṇ, Hanumāna, Sītā Rām, Badrinārāyaṇ, Navarāj and Candrāvatī. The southern end of the riverbank is used as a cremation ground (*ghāṭ*).



Map 12: Śālinadī Legends

1. The seat of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa; 2. Sataḥ; 3. Sataḥ; 4. Sataḥ; 5. Satyanārāyaṇa; 6. Hanumān; 7. Sitā Rām; 8. Śiva liṅga; 9. Gaṇeśa; 10. Dhalampu sataḥ; 11. Sarasvatī; 12. Hanumān; 13. Nāradaśvar Śiva mandir; 14. Gaṇeśa; 15. Nandi; 16. Śiva Bābā Kutī; 17. Gośālā 18. Akhaṇḍajyoti Mandir; 19. A statue of Viṣṇu under a papal tree; 20. Gorakhanāth; 21. Bhairava; 22. Gaṇeśa 23. Bhimsen Mandir; 24. Bhairav; 25. Sarasvatī; 26. Gaṇeśa; 27. Bhindyo Sataḥ; 28. Nāth Baba Kutī; 29. Viṣṇu Mandir; 30. Nāgdevatā; 31. Navarāj; 32. Candrāvati; 33. Badrinārāyaṇa 34. Vāsukināga. 35. Svasthānī temple (newly built).

Near the *ghāt*, a rest place (*phalcā*) is built to provide temporary shelter for relatives and friends of the deceased. The people of Sankhu and the surrounding villages regard Śālinadī as the holy Gangā. A few steps above the river there is another rest place made for a similar purpose. To the north of this rest place there is an open courtyard where the *vratālu* (participants of the month-long observance of Mādhavanārāyaṇa) gather every day. Several fire pits are made in the courtyard to light fires to keep people warm during the cold month of the festival. Against the eastern wall at the centre of the courtyard, a “seat” (*āsana*) for Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is located. The statue of Mādhavanārāyaṇ is placed on this seat during the month of the fast observance. The wall situated behind the seat of Mādhavanārāyaṇ is open on its two sides to let devotees enter into the courtyard and to let them out from the courtyard.

A few steps to the northeast of the courtyard is the *aṣṭamāṭṛkā* shrine with Byāghrinī. To the north of the *aṣṭamāṭṛkā* is a stone image of Sarasvatī. The shelter of the male *vratālu* is built on top of the Dhalampu hill, which is located about twenty-five metres above the courtyard. It is a single-roofed building with a fire pit where the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is placed among the male participants. It has a single entrance and two small windows facing south.

Outside the entrance of the Dhalampu rest place, an open space is created under the roof where the participants sit and sing devotional songs. Beneath the southeast corner of the rest place is a stone image of the Dhalampu dyo, the god of Dhalampu.

To the west of the Dhalampu shelter, a religious courtyard called Śivapurī is situated with a Śiva temple. This *śikhara* style temple is one-roofed. An image of Hanumāna and eight Śiva liṅga are to be found in the courtyard. I was told that all of those Śiva phalluses (*liṅga*) were made on the burial places of old Śaiva hermits (*sādhu*) who died at Śivapurī. A two-storeyed house is built for the hermits. At least one *sādhu* resides in this house permanently. He takes care of the daily worship of Śiva. The *sādhus* receive a monthly allowance of some food and money (*hundi*) from the Guthi Corporation. On different occasions they also receive alms from the Sankhu people. Many wandering *sādhus* visit this place and may live there as many days or months as they wish. At present, three *sādhus* are living at this place.

Most recently in 2007, a temple of Svasthānī mātā has been erected to the west of the Śivapurī-courtyard. This Nepalese style hexagonal pagoda temple has become an attraction in the area. Further west from this temple is a *pipal* tree, worshipped as god Viṣṇu. At the foot of this tree stands a stone image of Viṣṇu, stone images of Bhairava and Gorkhanātha. To the



west of this open platform is situated a courtyard with a rest place. The most important shrine in the courtyard is the stone image of Bhimsen with Draupatī and Gaṇeśa; therefore the courtyard is known as Bhimsen courtyard. Stone images of Gaṇeśa, Sarasvatī, Surya and Candra are also fixed here. A duplicate of Vāṃdā dyo is also established in this quarter for those who do not prefer to visit her in the temple of Vāṃdā dyo. The statue of Sarasvatī was moved to this courtyard. To the west of this courtyard, the ground of the *aśvamedha yajña* is located and where the *aśvamedha* fire sacrifice is performed on the last night of the month-long Mādhavanārāyaṇ observance. At the southeastern corner of the ground, a small roofless temple of Viṣṇu statues, which remained in a dilapidated condition for decades and only in 1999 it was reconstructed. To the north of this temple is a two storeyed rest house where a Gorkhanātha (Kānpḥaṭṭā) *yogi* couple live. They are taking care of the garden in front of the rest house and offer flowers to Vajrayoginī everyday. This couple lives from a stipend they receive from the Guthi Corporation and from alms given to them by people in Sankhu.

In 1991, a month-long fire sacrifice called “*Koṭyāhuti mahāyajña*” (the great Fire Sacrifice of ten millions) was performed a few steps north of the ground of the *aśvamedha yajña*. It was organised by some religious Hindu people from Sankhu. After the successful completion of the fire sacrifice, they built a permanent fire temple at the northwest corner of the Śivapurī courtyard to commemorate the “*mahāyajña*.” A huge fire pit is in the middle of the building, and a Brahmin priest is employed to take care of this temple and its ever-burning flame (*akhaṇḍajyoti*).

### **The Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* and its rituals**

A month before the actual festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, preparatory activities begin in Sankhu. In the past, the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi*, run by the individual *thekedār* Dharmadas Syārbā, used to organise the activities, but now these duties have been taken over by the Vajrayoginī VDC of Sankhu. As the chairman of the VDC, Govinda Dhaubaji, told me, he has received fifty thousand rupees from the Guthi Corporation to cover the expenses of the month-long festival since 1999. He told me that it used to be extremely difficult to persuade the *sābā* team to let the *vrata* participate, because the *guthi* was not in a position to supply satisfactory fees for them. At the same time, not very many visitors used to come to the Śālinadī to worship Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. Nowadays, because of the increasing number of visitors, their income during the festival month is also increasing every year. In the past, the *Guthi* Corporation used to

supply insufficient means to run the *guthi*, but nowadays the money they supply is enough to meet the expenses. The major part of the expenses during the *vrata* month relates to the ceremonial feeding of rice pudding to the participants, supplying the necessary wood for the Dhalampu rest house, and fees for *sābā* members and Brahmin priests. The chairman of the Vajrayoginī VDC expressed optimism about the smooth running of the festival. The major activities of the festival can be listed as follows:

- The first worship of Nāsaḥ dyo and the rehearsal of songs to be sung during the festival on the day of Yomaripunhi, a month before the festival;
- The second worship of Nāsaḥ dyo, four days before the Milā punhi;
- The final preparation of the *vrata*: the last feast with salt (*cibhvay*) and the distribution of holy water to the participants by the Rājopādhyāy priest, a day before Milā punhi;
- Milā punhi: start of the one-month abstinence (from salt in particular) for those who observe the fast; Bhārākūrā dāyegu, the day of smashing old earthenware in the afternoon on the same day; the beginning of the recitation of the sacred text, Svasthānī, in every Newar house and at the festival site bordering the river;
- *Dhalamdanegu*, daily rituals (in the festival month);
- Excursion of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa statue together with the *vratālu*, the participants in the fast, to sacred spots outside the town;
- Aśvamedha yajña: fire sacrifice concluding the festival, and the return of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa statue to the house of the Brahmin priest;
- The day after: Migāḥ pūjā worship of the fire-pit (in which a month-long fire has been burning) and breaking of the fast;
- Meeting of the participants in Sankhu who spend a night at the Mahādevadhvākā on the day of Silācarhe, the fourteenth day of Sillāgā and a fire sacrifice, which includes a snake, a sparrow, a fish and a goat's head at Sādhukolām.

### The first worship of Nāsaḥ dyo

A group of seven members called *sābā* play a vital role in the month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. They are also called the guardians of the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. These people come hereditarily from seven Śreṣṭha families known by their different nicknames: Syārbā, Giri, Kipārām, Pikhā, Hāmthām, Dhom and Pāim. Only these families in Sankhu are entitled to officiate in the festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa as *sābā*

or guardians. This day every year the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi* pays them three hundred rupees and gives them a *dhoti* each for their role. However, their main sources of income are the offerings they collect from the devotees during the festival month. Depending on the number of visitors, their income can exceed ten to twenty thousand rupees per person, one *sābā* member told me.

On the day of Yomaripunhi, a month before the actual beginning of the festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, the team of *sābā* performs worship at the shrine of Nāsaḥ dyo in the Dhomlā quarter. This is to begin the rehearsal of the songs to be sung during the festival. The worship of Nāsaḥ dyo is performed with a cock sacrifice. Its head and tail are divided as *sī* and handed over to *sābā* leader (*nāyo*) and his deputy (*nvaku*) during the feast. A member of the extended Syārbā families who participate in the *vrata* is considered *nāyo* and plays the cymbals, while a member of the Giri family who participates in the *vrata* is considered *nvaku*, the second leader, and he is also called song leader (*me nāyo*).<sup>9</sup> Each day the *sābā* team must sing a new song during the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual. The songs are dedicated to Kṛṣṇa, one of the incarnations of Viṣṇu. Therefore it is believed that the word *sābā* is derived from the word *sājavā* or cowherd or the devotee of Kṛṣṇa. They use only a pair of cymbals (*tā*) and six conches as instruments. In particular, the newcomers are trained to sing and blow in twelve different ways. On the Yomaripunhi, the couple, usually from Śreṣṭha families who intend to take the responsibility for being the *kaji* and *kajini*, the coordinator and his spouse in the *vrata*, must offer a *kisli* to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa to request his support for the task they are going to undertake. The person, also from Śreṣṭha family, who intends to carry the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa during the month of the festival, must also offer a *kisli* to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa at Balaṃpu on the same day.

### The second worship of Nāsaḥ dyo

Four days before the Milā punhi, the *sābā* group used to perform another worship of Nāsaḥ dyo with a cock sacrifice and used to eat a festive meal, but have abandoned this tradition, since they did not receive sufficient funds from the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi*. In 2000, they resumed this tradition, as the Vajrayoginī VDC, which is now responsible to run Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi*<sup>10</sup>, provided them necessary funds. However, this year, they performed the second worship only one day before the Milā punhi.

### The final preparation for the *vrata*

A day before the Milā punhī, the final preparation for the *vrata* takes place. On this day, female participants cut their fingernails and toenails and take a bath, while male participants do the same and also shave their heads before taking a bath. On this day, they all eat their last feast meal with salt (*cibhvay*). After their *cibhvay*, they offer a *kisli* to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and receive holy water (*jala*) from the Rājopādhyāy priest at the residence of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, as a ritual confirmation for the *vrata*. As soon as they receive the *jala*, they cannot mix with others who are not participating in the *vrata* and they are bound to obey the rules of the *vrata*. From this day onwards, male participants retreat from their homes to the Dhalampu rest house situated on the banks of the river Śālinadī, female participants find separate rooms in their own houses if they are from Sankhu, and outsiders rent rooms in the town. From this day onward, they are not supposed to observe any death or birth rituals in their family or to accept blessings from other deities until the end of the fire sacrifice of the *vrata* called Aśvamedha yajña. A fire at the Dhalampu rest house must be kept burning for the whole month. It is kindled this same day from the fire that the *sābā* members carry from the eternal fire kept at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. If the fire at the Dhalampu rest house goes out during the festival, the *sābā* members must bring fire from the Vajrayoginī in order to rekindle the fire.

This same evening, representatives of VDCs in Sankhu, local religious men and the *sābā* members meet to select the necessary ornaments from the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa store at Balampu to adorn the god Mādhavanārāyaṇ during the festival. After selecting adequate ornaments, one of those present lists them and hands them to the *sābā* members. Most of the ornaments are made of silver. Devotees from various places have gifted these ornaments. At about eight in the evening, the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is taken out from the Balampu residence. The Rājopādhyāy priest hands over the statue to the person who is taking care of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa (*dyo jvanimha*) during the festival month that year. The statue is taken first to the residence of the *kaji*, the coordinator of the festival, for the feast including salt (*cibhvay*).

At the main gate of the *kaji*'s house, his wife (*kajini*) receives the god by offering materials for worshipping. As I witnessed in 2000, the statue was carried straight to the top floor (*baiga*) of the house and placed against the southern wall in the top corner where the *cibhvay* is prepared for the *kaji*, *kajini*, and *sābā* members. Next to the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa a straw mat was spread against the eastern wall for the *kaji*, the *sābā*

members and the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa carrier to sit facing east for their feast meal. The ingredients of the meal are similar to other feasts of the Newars: meat, vegetables, beans and beaten rice. A portion of each food that also includes liquors and rice beer was set apart on a leaf plate and offered to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. Two more portions, one for the Brahmin priest and another for the house, were also placed in front of the statue. The portions of food offered to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and to the priest were sent to the Rājopādhyāy priest's home after the end of the feast.

After the feast, the *kaji*, all *sābā* and the carrier of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa went to the Dugāhiti quarter to take a bath at the stone tap. Then they went to Balaṃpu, the Rājopādhyāy priest's residence, to receive *jala* from the priest. Finally late at night, they carried the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa from the *kaji*'s house to the Dhalāmpu rest house in Śālinadī. From this day till the end of the month-long fast the *kaji*, *sābā* and all the male participants sleep in the Dhalāmpu rest house.<sup>11</sup> From this day onward till the end of the *vrata* the male participants must wear a garland of 108 beads made from the *tulasi* plant. Females wear only red coloured dresses. They observe strict rules such as abstaining from eating salt and wearing shoes, keeping apart from family members, and so on. Only those males who have undergone the *kaytā pūjā* initiation and those females who have observed *ihī*, the ritual marriage, can participate in the *vrata*. Women with small babies are allowed to participate in the *vrata*; in such a case the babies are called *dhalāmmacā* or infant participants of the *vrata*. A menstruating woman is considered polluted for four days and she has to take the utmost care not to touch others during this period. Women in period may begin the *vrata*, but they must stay apart from others for four days so that they will not touch other participants. For women participants, the *vrata* is considered incomplete if menstruation takes place towards the end of the *vrata* before completing the Aśvamedha yajña, the concluding fire sacrifice.

### **Milā punhi: start of the *vrata***

#### ***The morning ritual***

The activities of the *vrata* begin early in the morning. Around five o'clock in the morning, a person employed by the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi* goes through the town of Sankhu blowing a conch to wake up women participants. In this way, for the whole month he wakes up women participants so that they arrive at the river Śālinadī early in the morning. Male participants who sleep in the Dhalāmpu rest house make themselves

ready before the women participants arrive at Śālinadī. As soon as all the participants have assembled on the banks of the river, the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is carried out from the Dhalampu rest house for the ritual bath in the river Śālinadī. The *dyo jvanimha* carries the statue from the rest house. On its way to the river from the rest house devotees pay respects to the god by touching it and offering items for worship. Preferably they finish the bathing ritual before dawn, and this means earlier than six o'clock in the morning. However, sometimes they can be very late in taking a bath. Usually that occurs a day after their return from long excursions outside the town.



Plate 29 A devotee is paying respect to the god Mādhavnārāyaṇa (January 2000).

Meanwhile the *vrata* participants finish their first ritual bath. The participants in the fast are supposed to take a bath five times a day, but four times they bathe only symbolically (*paṃcasnāna*). The ritual bathing is meant to purify one's body and mind to keep oneself away from dirt so that one can approach the god without any contamination. As soon as all the *vrata* participants have finished offering water, the ritual bathing takes place. The *dyo jvanimha* hands the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa over to the *kaji* to take the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa to the river for the ritual bathing. Standing on the bank of the river, the *sābā nāyo* plays cymbals and other *sābā* members blow conchshell to indicate the right moment for taking the bath. All the participants plunge into the cold water as soon as they hear the sound of the cymbals and conches. The *kaji* also immerses the statue

three times in the water, and others also follow him. Then the *kaji* moves instantly towards the temple to place the statue on its seat. At the same time all the male participants, except the *sābā* members, prostrate themselves (*duṃ danegu*) before the temple, while the female participants just walk into the temple courtyard and sit around the fire pits (*migāh*) to warm themselves up. Among the male participants, the one who reaches the temple first and touches the god first on the first day, goes in front of the procession carried through the town every day. The general public is allowed to worship the god as soon as the participants have completed their prostration. Usually the devotees continue visiting the god for worship for the whole morning, sometimes continuing till late afternoon.

### ***Hareśiva or Mādha hālegu, the singing of devotional songs***

Very early, every morning, a group of old and young men from Sankhu arrive at Śālinadī and begin singing devotional songs as soon as the *vrata* participants have finished their ritual bathing. Singing songs they walk towards the town. They enter the town through the Dhalamkodhvākā, and then they walk around the temple of the goddess Mahālakṣmī in the Calākhu quarter. From the Calākhu quarter they go to Jotirliṅgeśvar (Mahādev) temple via the Sālkhā quarter, round the temple of Mahādeva and other monuments of deities, and return to the Sālkhā quarter, where they end their procession. Every morning they repeat the singing at about the same time. In other Newar settlements, although they do not celebrate the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata*, they have a similar tradition of singing such songs every morning when visiting confluences of rivers during this month. This tradition, which is known as ‘Hareśiva’ hālegu in Sankhu, is known as Mādha hālegu in other Newar settlements.

### ***Worship of the Svasthānī text***

In the meantime the participants of the *vrata* on the banks of the Śālinadī individually worship the Svasthānī text, placed in a rest place adjacent to the temple. It is a manuscript in the Newar language. In the past, a Newar Bhaṭṭa Brahmin used to read this text aloud. Since 1997, when he abandoned his task, a Parvate Brahmin has taken over this task. As the chairman of the Vajrayoginī VDC told me, the Newar Bhaṭṭa Brahmin demanded too much return for his duties, and it was not possible to arrange this, so he replaced him with a Parvate Brahmin. In the year 2000, when I was in Sankhu observing the festival, the new Brahmin displayed the same text to be worshipped, but he was not reading the text because he

was unable to read the Newar language. However, he did carry out the consecration of foodstuffs brought to distribute among the participants by devotees. In return he received some money (five to twenty-five Nepalese rupees) from the devotees as his fees.

### *Dhalaṃdanegu*

Every day the *Kaji*'s wife washes ornaments belonging to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, while one of the *sābā* members puts the ornaments on the statute of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. Around mid-day, the participants prepare themselves for *dhalaṃdanegu*, the noon ritual in the temple courtyard. *Dhalaṃdanegu* is the major act of worship of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa performed by the participants around mid-day every day. An Rājopādhyāy priest performs priestly tasks for the rituals. The rituals last about two hours and are carried out every mid-day for the whole month. All the female participants carry their own basket (*dhaki*) with items for worship, while the male participants each carry a small tin container with similar items. The *kaji* and his wife are responsible for playing the role of a *yajamāna* couple during this ritual. Including all other worshipping ingredients, a symbolic offering of one hundred and eight varieties of flower to the god takes place during the ritual.

The *sābā* troupe have the special task of blowing conchshell and of singing different devotional songs related to Kṛṣṇa (*gitagovinda*) during the ritual every day, while the Brahmin priest recites mantras from a handwritten text and instructs the participants to offer Mādhav Nārāyaṇa different ingredients each time. Each time, the participants chant the word 'mādhva mādhva' when they offer ingredients to the god. It is also a custom for them to chant the name of the god 'Mādhav Nārāyaṇa' in a rhythmical way continuously while they are seated, taking a rest or walking around.

According to the priests, to do the *vrata* of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa means to please the god by wiping out everything from one's mind and taking refuge in him. Chanting his name and excluding everything from the mind makes a person pure. The god always grants such a person whatever he wishes.

One of the most important moments for the participants is to concentrate on the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, which enables them to communicate their wishes to the god. Every day, for the whole month, those participants who concentrate their mind and worship the god wholeheartedly at the time of *dhalaṃdanegu* have a great chance of having their wishes fulfilled. People who participate in this *vrata* may wish for different things: the unmarried wish to find a suitable partner, the



childless wish for a child, a poor person wishes for wealth and an ill person desires health. Many men in Sankhu claimed that their wives conceived sons after having observed the *vrata* of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. The priest claims that the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is very generous and capable of fulfilling any wishes of his devotees.

He is also very powerful and strong enough to punish those who are greedy, selfish or deliberately harm others.

### ***The procession of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and participants***

As soon as the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual ends, the participants proceed towards the town of Sankhu. The person who takes the responsibility for carrying the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa that year has to carry it in his hands when the participants move to town. He must cover his mouth with a piece of white cloth as he carries the statue. This is to prevent him from speaking, because he is not allowed to talk while he carries the god. On the way to the town all the participants chant the name of the god “Mādhav Nārāyaṇa.” They enter the town through the Dhalamkodbhākā, situated to the east of the town. As soon as they enter this gate, the *sābā* members begin to sing.

When they arrive in the centre of the Sālkhā quarter, the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is placed on the platform of Viṣṇu for some time. In the meantime, the male participants prepare themselves for the procession in town. The male participants, except the *sābā* members, *kaji* and the statue carriers, wear only a lower garment (*dhoti*) and a turban. Two men make one pair, and they go in pairs, one with an earthen or copper jar with a thousand spouts (*sahasradhārā*) on his head and another prostrating himself and rolling in front of him. A number of female participants follow the procession, each with a small water pot in their hands to pour water on the *sahasradhārā*, and this is done in front of each deity they pass during the procession.

From the Sālkhā quarter the procession passes through Calākhu, Dugāhiti, Suṃtol, Nālāgāh, Ipātol, Iṃlātōl, Pukhulāchī, Dhomlā, Sālkhā, Vāphale and the Sālkhā Mahādeva temple. Subsequently, as the procession arrives in front of the Balampu, the residence of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and the Brahmin priests, the priest who performs the *Dhalaṃdanegu* ritual at the Śālinadī has to pour water on all the *sahasradhārā* carriers before he takes his meal for the day. It is not necessary for all the female participants to follow the procession in the town until the procession ends, but all of them must pour water on the *sahasradhārā* at least one of the spots in the town before they eat their meal.



Plate 30 The sacred river banks of Śālinadī, where the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa vrata takes place (January 2000).



Plate 31 Śālinadī crowded with devotees and participants during the vrata (January 2000).



Plate 32 The participants in the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa vrata at Śalinadī (January 2000).

However, some of the female participants must follow the procession so that there is somebody who can pour water on the *sahasradhārā* as they reach a certain point on the route where it is essential to pour water. There are 108 spots in Sankhu where they pour water on the *sahasradhārā*. These spots are in front of one or another god or goddess in the town who are paid respect in this way. The procession concludes in front of Sāikhā Mahādev temple. After ending the procession, the male participants take their final bath of the day in the Sundarīghaṭ at the Mahādevadvākā complex, while female participants return home.

Although it is said that all the participants must take a bath five times a day, only male participants take full baths three times and bathe symbolically (*pañcasnāna*) twice, while women participants take a full bath only once a day, and bathe symbolically four times. The procession of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa follows the same route in the town as other participants. Every day, the same person carries out the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, and behind him the *sābā* members walk singing devotional songs dedicated to the lord Kṛṣṇa (*gītgovinda*). The *sābā nāyo* plays cymbals throughout the town while others blow conch shells only when they arrive in front of temples or the places of gods and goddesses. The *kajī* also walks with them with a cotton bag containing flowers in his hand to

distribute as blessings among the bystanders who ask for it or come to pay their respects to the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa.

It seems that the procession of the participants through the town is to pay respects to all the deities around the town. For the human participants to pay respect to deities is logical, but the procession of the god halting in front of every important god and goddess to pay his respects is difficult to explain.



Plate 33. In the afternoon, male participants of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa vrata walking through the town in pairs: one carries a thousand-spouted jar (sahasradhārā) on his head while the other has to roll on the ground. Women participants follow them to pour water on thousand-spouted jar at different spots (January 1994).

### *Smashing of earthenware (bhārākūrā dāyegu)*

On the first day of the festival, in each quarter, local people collect old and broken earthen pots from every household in Sankhu and pile them up in the centre of each quarter. These pots are destroyed in a ceremonial way, called *bhārākūrā dāyegu*. Children wait for the arrival of the procession of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa because they can smash these pots only upon the arrival of the god in the centre of a quarter. As soon as the procession of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa arrives at the centre of a quarter the *sābā* members blow conch shells, and this is the sign for the children to smash the pots. This day is

observed in other parts of the Valley too. On this day, a *kalaśa* representing the shrine of Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa is carried to Hanumāṇdhokā, the old palace in Kathmandu. According to a myth, this custom was begun as a trick to prevent Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa leaving Nepal.

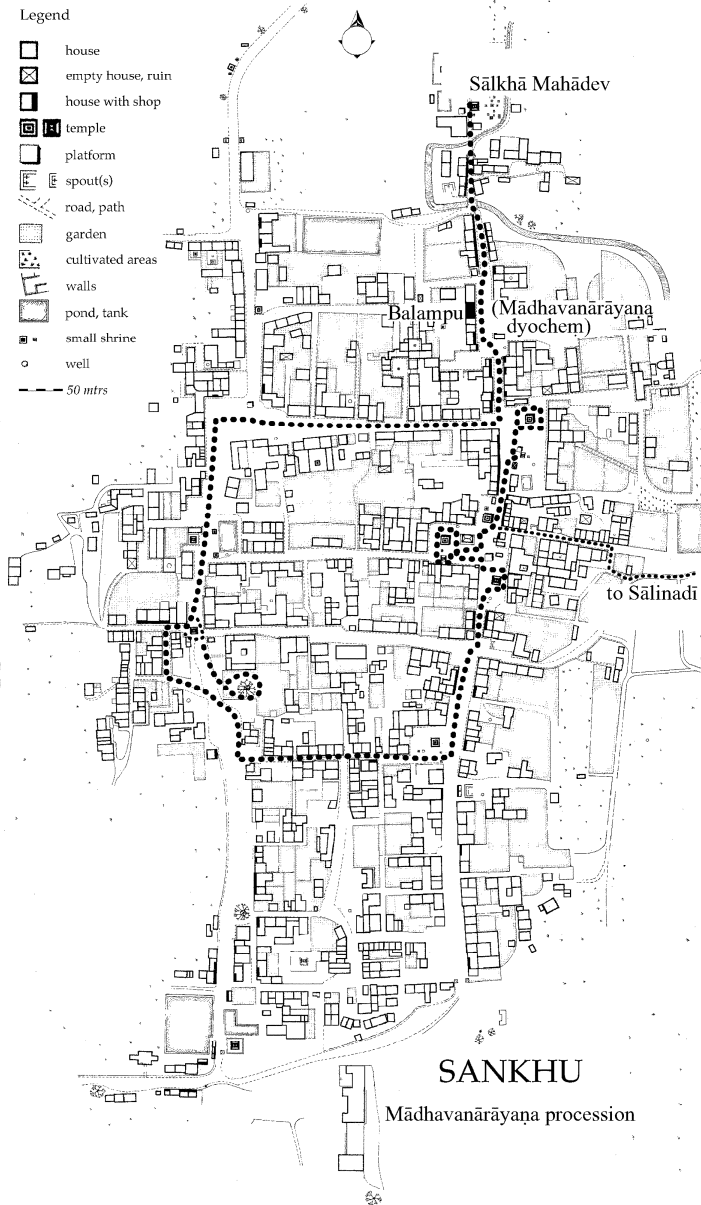
This myth relates that as the god Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa was going to leave Nepal for Banaras, then the king and the people arranged for the destruction of earthen pots at every crossroads he had to pass.

It is considered to be inauspicious to embark on a long journey when one sees broken pots, so this trick prevented Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa from leaving Nepal. It is believed that from that day onwards the people in Nepal have continued this tradition once every year on Milā punhi.

### Food and sleep

On the first day of the festival the participants decide whether to eat one meal or two meals a day. In 2000, it was found that all the 314 participants preferred one meal a day. They must stick to this rule for the whole month. The participants must cook their meal themselves in a kitchen separate even from their own family. They must take the utmost care in the matter of eating food. They are allowed to eat only cooked rice, beaten rice, red radish, ginger, ghee, molasses, sugar, milk, spinach from Patan (*yale palah*) only, peas, roots such as yam and *saki*, fruits such as oranges, sugarcane, only one kind of banana (*mālapu kerā*) and the *āmāli* fruit (*spondias acuminata*). Eating spices and salt is strictly prohibited. At the time of eating, if one finds a hair or any forbidden foods on one's plate such as grains of millet, one must discard the food and cook again.

From the first day of the festival, the recitation of the sacred text Svasthānī begins in every household in Sankhu. Every evening, the participants must listen to the Svasthānī story or recite it before they go to sleep. Women participants may sleep inside the town; if a woman is from Sankhu she sleeps in her own house but stays apart from other members of the family, and if she is an outsider, she rents a room in the town.<sup>12</sup> Male participants sleep at the Dhalāmpu rest house on the banks of the Śālinadī, but not in the town. Women participants are not allowed to step into the Dhalāmpu rest house. The participants must observe celibacy for the whole month. The participants are not restricted from touching each other, but they must take utmost care not to touch others, especially avoiding touching those with shoes and people from unclean and untouchable castes. If a person accidentally touches a person from an untouchable caste, this person is required to take a full bath and be sprinkled with water from his conch shell by one of the *sābā* members.



Map 13

### *Offering of foodstuffs, clothes, cash and ornaments*

Every day, many devotees come to Śālinadī to offer foodstuffs, fruits, money and clothes to the participants and to the god. Not only people from Sankhu but also people from other parts of the Valley begin pouring into Sankhu to worship Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and to distribute foodstuffs to the participants, right from the beginning of the festival. Paying respect to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and distributing various things to the participants in the fast, people anticipate fulfilment of their various wishes. Those who distribute rice flour together with molasses to cook *yomari* wish to procure a boy child. Similarly, those women who distribute make-up kits anticipate a long life for their husbands. For most families in Sankhu, it is their religious duty to offer food to the participants every year. They call it *nakegu*, feeding the participants. The participants in the fast must not hesitate to accept an offering, otherwise this might cause a loss of the merit they earn from the fast. Next morning, when they take their ritual bath, they must wash their hair several times for each item they received the day before, so that the person who offered the thing also gains merit.

Many devotees also come to offer silver and golden ornaments, water pots (*kalaśa*), cups (*pañcapātra*) to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa during this month. The food and money offered to the god during the festival are shared among the *sābā* members, but ornaments and utensils offered to the god are carefully registered, and stored so that they do not get lost. Silver ornaments in various shapes such as barley garlands, garlands of *tulasī* beads, leaves called *kikimpā*, the divine serpent (*nāga*), chains and garlands of coins are among them. In 2000, I had an opportunity to record some of the ornaments on video while they were being handed down to the *sābā* members to decorate the god during the festival month. The Brahmin priest Surendra, who takes care of the store of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, told me that the ornaments, he handed over to the *sābā* were only a small portion of what he had in the store. The oldest ornament I could record on that occasion was dated AD 1871 (991 NS), and it was made partly of silver and partly of gold. The newest item offered to the god was a silver cup with a spoon (*pañcapātra*) dated AD 1998 (2055 VS). In most cases, the name of the person, place and date are mentioned on such items and ornaments offered to the god. I was able to note down dates inscribed on twelve *kikimpā*, fifteen other varieties of ornaments and a cup.<sup>13</sup> Surendra told me that very old and worn out ornaments were not brought out.

The number of visitors increases at the pilgrimage site every following day until the final day of the festival. Especially Saturdays, Śrīpaṃcamī, Lagalāsaptamī, Ekādaśī, and the last day of the festival are heavily crowded. Identifying Sankhu (at least during this month) with Lāvanya

desa, the kingdom of the king Navarāj and the river as Śālinadī from the legend Svasthānī helps a great deal in attracting pilgrims to Sankhu in this month. In the past it used to be less crowded but the number is increasing year by year because of the improvement in transportation facilities to Sankhu.

**Table 19 Number of *vratālu* according to place of origin in the year 2000**

Place	Number
Sankhu	63
Indrāyaṇī	16
Pālubārī	7
Bilgoṭh	10
Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa	6
Kathmandu	40
Bhaktapur	101
Patan	13
Nālā	15
Banepā	24
Samkhu	2
Panaufī	11
Khopāsī	1
Bārhabishe	2
Mandan	1
Nāmlāmtār	1
Sāṃgā	1
Total	314

Similarly, modern media such as radio and television are helping greatly to increase the number of visitors by informing people about the significance of Svasthānī, Śālinadī and Sankhu. In 1989, a movie called ‘Tilahari’ received a great number of spectators because the producer publicised a story based on Svasthānī. This cinema helped promoting the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* in Sankhu as the Svasthānī *vrata*. Ravi Mākāḥ, the present chairman of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *Vrata* Sevā Samiti, told me that in the past there were only a small number of participants and not many visitors from far away places either. Several times it was difficult to find a person to take the responsibility for acting as *kaji* till the last moment. In 1955, when he participated as the statue carrier, there were fewer than twenty participants. Even the *sābā* members who were obliged to participate in



the *vrata* did so hesitatingly. In the following years too, the number did not increase significantly. In 1965, when he participated in the *vrata* as *kaji*, the number of participants was thirty-three. However, the number was increasing year after year. In 1983, when Linda Ilitis observed this festival, she recorded 118 participants. In 2000, when I was doing my fieldwork, the number of participants was 314. Among them 32 were male and the rest were female from different parts of the Valley. See the table below.

### Displaying the god (dyo bvayegu)

The statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is carried to the old palace courtyard in Sankhu to be displayed on one of the convenient days of the bright half of the Sillā month. This is done after having completed the regular procession in the town in the afternoon. This happens a few days after the new moon of Sillā. Only the *sābā* team and the *kaji* accompany the statue to the palace courtyard. While they are visiting the courtyard, only the statue carrier steps onto the platform of the king (*juju dabū*) and sits there for a while, but others stand just below the platform until he steps down, because no others are allowed to step onto the stage. From the palace courtyard the statue is carried straight to the house of the person responsible for taking care of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi*, nowadays to the house of the chairman of the Vajrayoginī VDC. The chairman's family worships the god and offer food, fruits and money. On another occasion, the statue is carried to the *sābā* leader's home where it receives similar worship. Both these ceremonies are called the displaying of the god or *dyo bvayegu*.

### Lagalāsaptamī (the day of rolling for the male participants in the town)

This day is considered to be one of the most important days of the festival. A day before Lagalāsaptamī in the late night, the *sābā* members go to make drawings of divine serpents, tridents, lord Viṣṇu's four weapons: conch shell, wheel (*cakra*), lotus and mace (*gadā*) with white sand at the crossroads of the town as a preparation for the next day. These symbols are considered auspicious, and symbolise the cleaning of the road for the procession of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa.

Early in the morning, at least one woman from each family in Sankhu arrives at Śālinadī to set lights afloat on the river (*mata cuikegu*). These lights are made of pieces of pine-tree, cotton and purified butter attached

to bowls made of leaves. Before people set the bowls afloat on the river, they worship them on the banks of the river. People believe that through the floating of lights in rivers on this day diseases and illnesses also float away and this enables them to keep healthy in the coming year. This day is one of the busiest days at Śālinadī, with floods of people coming to worship Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in this way.

On the day of Lagalāsaptamī, after the completion of the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual, the participants in the fast go in procession through the town in a festive mood. From the first day of the procession, the male participants of the *vrata* who form pairs by accompanying the *sahasradhārā* carriers are obliged to roll (*tulegu*) on the ground for a certain distance each day so that they complete one full *pradakṣiṇa* of the town rolling within the time span of a week or two. However, on the day of Lagalāsaptamī, they are obliged to complete the procession of the town by rolling in a single day. This is the most rigorous task these male participants perform during the month-long festival. To ease their plight while they are rolling, local volunteer organisations spread cotton carpets on their way. Other male participants who carry *sahasradhārā* on their heads decorate their *sahasradhārā* with colourful papers. The *kaji* and the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa carrier both carry *sahasradhārā* on their heads during the procession, while four people are hired to carry the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa on a palanquin. Women participants, who pour water on top of the *sahasradhārā*, adorn themselves with beautiful clothes and ornaments. The *sābā* members follow the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa singing devotional songs, playing cymbals and blowing conch shells as usual. This day, the Hareśiva singers' group also joins the processing with musical instruments. In the past Jogi musicians used to join the procession, but they stopped in the early 1990s.<sup>14</sup> The procession takes several hours to complete the circling of the town because of the slow pace of rolling. In 2000, the procession began at about five in the afternoon and ended at about eleven at night. This procession attracts a great number of people from outside too, because it is the most spectacular event of the month-long festival.

### Ceremonial feeding

On the ninth of Sillāthva, the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi* feeds pudding made of milk and rice to the participants in the fast in the evening. According to Govinda Dhaubaji, the chairman of Vajrayoginī VDC who is taking care of the *guthi* nowadays, the cost of feeding pudding amounts twenty to thirty thousand rupees depending upon the number of participants. For the ceremonial feeding he hires several Brahmins to cook the pudding.

Together with pudding, spinach and *āmāli* fruit (*spondias acuminata*), are served. This is a ceremony of mass feeding; so all the participants begin eating at the same time and wait until all have finished their meal. If one stands up in the middle of the meal, the others cannot continue eating. In the past, the ceremonial feeding used to take place at Ibica, on the banks of the river Śālinadī about five hundred metres north from the Śālinadī proper, but nowadays it takes place at Śālinadī itself. Any individual who wishes to may organise such a mass feeding.

### **The excursions of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa together with the *vratālu***

The *vratālu* spend most of their time in Sankhu, but they have to make several excursions outside the town halfway through the *vrata* to sacred spots.

#### **To Vajrayoginī**

Their first journey is on the thirteenth of the dark half of Thiṃlā to the Vajrayoginī temple situated to the north of the town at a distance of about three kilometres. On this day, apart from the *sābā* members, the *kaji*, the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa carrier and only one *sahasradhārā* carrier go round the town, while all the other male participants in the fast must prostrate themselves, measuring the distance with their bodies from Śālinadī to Vajrayoginī. On 3 February 2000, they began the prostration at about one o'clock p.m. from the Śālinadī. Their prostration continued through the town, but as they arrived north of the Dhomlā Mahādev temple, they began to walk, except when they arrived close to one or another shrine of deities. Until they arrived in front of the one hundred and eight stone steps leading to the Vajrayoginī temple, they just walked, and then they prostrated themselves again up to the gate of Vajrayoginī and stopped there the first day to go back to the town.

Next day, after they finish performing the *dhalamdanegu* ritual at Śālinadī, they first walked towards the Vajrayoginī temple and resumed the prostration from the same place where they had stopped the day before. On this day, they first prostrate themselves from the gate towards the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple and over the stone steps into the sanctuary. After prostrating inside the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple, they went to the Guṃganeśa temple, and then to the temple sanctuary of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju. After paying respects to the goddess Hyāumkhvāḥ māju their prostration complete.

In the meantime the *sahasradhārā* carrier, who goes round the town alone, arrive in the temple courtyard with the *sahasradhārā* on his head. Simultaneously, all the women participants, the *kaji*, the *sābā* members and the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa arrive in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. The *sahasradhārā* carrier goes round the temple, the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ mājū and the Guṇgaṇeśa temple and back to the Hyāumkhvāḥ mājū temple complex. In front of the Vāsukināga shrine the participant women pour water on his *sahasradhārā*, marking the end of their excursion to Vajrayoginī. The Mādhav Nārāyaṇa carrier with the statue in his hands steps in front of the gate of Hyāumkhvāḥ mājū and stood showing the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa to the goddess in a gesture of respect. At that moment the *sābā* members who stand behind the statue blow their conch shells to indicate their arrival at the temple. As one of the *sābā* informants told me, this is the sacred meeting of the two deities, which takes place once a year. After the *sābā* members receive flowers and holy water (*jala*) from the priest on duty at the temple, they move away from the temple gate, and, together with Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, they go around the Hyāumkhvāḥ mājū and Jogeśvar temples. Unlike other participants, the *sābā* members, the *kaji* and the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa carrier do not enter the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ mājū.

After fifteen or twenty minutes of rest at the sanctuary, the participants descend towards the town. Before they entering the town, they have to wait at the Sālkhā Mahādev temple complex for all the participants to arrive. Once all the participants arrived there, one of the *sābā* members sprinkled water from his conch shell on all the participants in a gesture of purification, and then they walk into the town and dispersed to their respective homes.

As we know, the town of Sankhu is believed to be a creation of the goddess Vajrayoginī, so most rituals performed in the town are centred round her. In the case of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* the relation between the two deities can be seen right from the beginning. As we know, the *sābā* must bring fire from the temple of Vajrayoginī to kindle the fire in the Dhalampū rest house where the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is kept during the festival month. It seems that the fire kept in the Dhalampū rest house is needed to acquire protection from the goddess Vajrayoginī. The god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and the *vrata* participants must make a number of tours to different temples of the Valley during the month of this *vrata*. The excursion to the temple of Vajrayoginī is the first in the sequence of such excursions. It is only logical that they pay their first visit to the goddess Vajrayoginī, because she is the most important shrine in the ritual realm of the town of Sankhu. It is clear that this visit is to pay respects to the

goddess. This visit shows more clearly that the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and the *vrata* participants need blessings from the goddess Vajrayoginī in order to complete their month-long *vrata*. In terms of ritual hierarchy, this visit makes it clear that Vajrayoginī is in a superior position to that of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa.

### To Goladesa or Paśupati

After their return from Vajrayoginī, on the same day, they leave for an excursion to Goladesa where the famous temple of Paśupatināth is situated. After their meal they leave for Goladesa in the evening. Goladesa is at a distance of about fourteen kilometres from Sankhu. Volunteers from Sankhu associated with Svasthānī Vrata Sevā Samiti and Śālinadī Sudhār Samiti assist the participants on their way to Goladesa. The carrier, not in his hands, carries the statue of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in a basket. It becomes late in the night when they reach I Paśupati. Near the Paśupati temple, there is a rest house where the participants in the *vrata* spend the night.

The following morning they take their regular bath in the river Bagmatī, which flows beneath the Paśupati temple to the east. After the bath, the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is placed in a small temple situated on the western bank of the river Bāgmatī. For a few hours, the devotees are allowed to pay their respects to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, but at about nine in the morning the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual begins. The open space on the western bank of the river is used for this purpose and visitors are not allowed to enter the area while the ritual is taking place. In the year 2000, a Rājopādhyāy priest, Bhismajvalananda, who lives in Goladesa, presided over the ritual. He possessed a copy of handwritten ritual instructions. The rituals are the same as those carried out every day at Śālinadī. After the completion of the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual, the participants went on a procession through the temple of Paśupati and the town of Goladesa.

As soon as the procession concludes, they walk to the place called Calampākhā, Sānogaucaran that has now been turned into a football field. Many devotees from Kathmandu, especially people from the Naxal quarter, come to this place to distribute food, money and other goods to the participants and to pay their respects to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. In 2000, I saw several hundred such devotees distributing money, food and fruits to the participants. One informant told me that the number of devotees is increasing year by year.

Soon after the devotees finish the distribution, the *vratālu* take their day's meal at the same place. Then they walk towards Pharping, another

Newar town situated at a distance of 22 kilometres from Kathmandu towards the south, where the temple of Śeṣa nārāyaṇa is situated. Together with the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in a basket carried by the carrier on his back, the *sābā* members take the road via the Nārāyaṇahiti palace in Kathmandu, while all other participants take a shortcut via the Naxal quarter of Thāpāthalī to Pharping. In the past, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa used to be carried inside the Nārāyaṇahiti royal palace, where it used to receive worship on the part of the king, but since 1989 this tradition has been abandoned, as the security guards did not permit entry to the palace area. In 2000, when they arrived close to the royal palace gate, the *sābā* members still blew the conch shells, which they consider the announcement of their arrival at the palace. Then they walked into the old city of Kathmandu through Jamal and via Ason, Indrachok to Hanumāṇdhokā, the ancient royal palace. Inside the Nāsaḥcuka, the courtyard of Hanumāṇdhokā, a government official offered worship to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. Many local devotees from Kathmandu also arrived to pay their respects to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa with items of worship in their hands. Since they were in a hurry to leave for Pharping, not all the devotees had a chance to worship Mādhav Nārāyaṇa.

The excursion to Goladesa can also be seen as the visit of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa to pay his respects to the god Paśupati. As we can see when the excursion passes the city of Kathmandu, it has to pass both the new and the old palaces of the reigning king. A *sābā* informant said that this is to bless the king so that his reign may continue without obstacles. He was also explicit in saying that because of the refusal to let them enter the Nārāyaṇahitī royal palace, the king had to face serious trouble in 1990. However, worship from a government official at Hanumāṇdhokā is repeated every year, and this is a sign of respect shown by the king towards the god.

### To Pharping

In Pharping, a rest house is arranged for the participants in the fast to spend the night. It is situated just below the temple of Śeṣa nārāyaṇa. Next day, early in the morning, the participants and the statue take a bath in the pond situated next to the rest house. Then the devotees from Pharping are allowed to worship Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and distribute foods, fruits and money to the participants for a few hours. A local Rājopādhyāy priest, Sumanraj, who is also the priest of Śeṣa nārāyaṇa, presided over the *dhalamdanegu* ritual in 2000. Then the participants go in procession from Śeṣa nārāyaṇa to Pharping town. All the participants leave Pharping as

soon as they finish the procession to the town. The statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is also carried in the procession to the town. The priest receives Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in his house, which is situated in the middle of the town. One of his neighbours, who also belongs to a priestly family in the town, worship the god. After their worship the procession continue through the town and leave for Sankhu.

On the way to Sankhu, they stop at the Saṃkhamulaghāt situated on the bank of river Bāgmatī in Patan. There they take their meal here, but also receive fruits, spinach, foodstuffs and milk from many devotees of Patan who come to distribute. The participants are not allowed to take their meal until the devotees finish their distribution. In 2000 it was almost dark when they began eating their meal. After the meal, they still walk more than eighteen kilometres to reach Sankhu. It becomes late night when all the participants arrive in Sankhu. This ends their longest excursion outside the town. After that, they have two days of rest in Sankhu.

The priest in Pharping claimed that the visit of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa to Pharping is according to an agreement made between the people of Sankhu and Pharping in the past. He said that originally the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa belonged to Pharping, but that the people of Sankhu had stolen it. While they were carrying the statue away the people of Pharping noticed it and followed them. They were caught when they were crossing the river Bāgmatī. Since they had come very far from Pharping, both parties agreed to let the statue be carried to Sankhu, on the condition that it be carried back to Pharping once every year. Although this story is often told, it is unlikely to be a historical account of what happened.

## To Panauti

Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and the *vrata* participants make their next excursion to Panauti, another Newar town situated to the southeast of Sankhu at a distance of about thirty kilometres. This excursion is scheduled for the third of Sillāthva. Usually, they leave Sankhu in the evening for Panauti. They reach Panauti towards midnight only. Social workers in Panauti make ready some of the rooms in a local high school for them to sleep. The following morning they take their bath in the river Tribenī of Panauti.

As in the other places, devotees from Panauti come to pay their respects to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and to distribute food, spinach, fruits and soaked peas to the participants as soon as the participants finish their morning bath. Unlike in other places, no local priest is there in Panauti to preside over the session, so the *kaji* has to act as a priest to instruct the

participants how to perform the rituals. In 2000, one of the *sābā* members had to assist the *kaji*, as he was not proficient enough. Soon after the completion of the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual, the distribution of foodstuffs continues in the school compound situated next to the temple complex. Then the participants go in a procession through the town. On their way back to Sankhu, they pause on an open ground situated between the towns of Nālā and Banepā. Again, big crowds of devotees come to distribute foodstuffs to participants and pay respect to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. After that the participants take their meal.

It is obvious that the excursion made to Panauti is to pay respect to another religious site, namely Tribenī, the place where three rivers meet and the location of the shrine of Indreśvor Mahādeva. Both Tribenī and Indreśvor in Panauti are very important sites for pilgrims. The excursion made by the *vrata* participants can well be considered a pilgrimage, which gives them religious merits.

## To Cāṃgu

The last journey outside the town is to Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa on the eleventh day of Sillā or on the day of Bhima ekādaśī. Cāṃgu is at a distance of about six kilometres from Sankhu. The participants spend a night in the rest houses near the temple of Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa. In Cāṃgu, the pond where the *vrata* participants used to take a bath was destroyed long ago. However, for the morning ritual bath the participants collect water in a pot and gather close to the old pond and take a symbolic bath. After the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual, the participants return to Sankhu.

Cāṃgu is one of the oldest Viṣṇu temples in the Kathmandu Valley. It is among the four most important Viṣṇu shrines in the Valley. The last excursion to this place by Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and the *vratālu* is again clearly an indication of showing their respect to the god Viṣṇu of Cāṃgu.

## Significance of the excursions

There are different views about the excursions of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and company during the *vrata*. According to Bhismajvalananda, a senior Rājopādhyāy priest residing in Paśupati, these excursions are to visit the important divine serpent Vāsukināga, because the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa himself wears a Vāsukināga as one of his ornaments. According to him, Vajrayoginī, Paśupati, Pharping, Panauti and Cāṃgu all possess an important shrine of Vāsukināga. Therefore, the excursions of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa to these places are to renew contacts with them. However, the



shrines of Vāsukināga are not considered to be the main shrines of these places, such as in Vajrayoginī the Vajrayoginī herself, in Goledeśa the shrine of Paśupati, in Pharping the shrine of Śeṣa nārāyaṇa, in Panauti the shrine of Indreśvar Mahādeva Śiva and in Cāṃgu the shrine of Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa. When the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa arrives at the sanctuary of Vajrayoginī, it is carried straight in front of the gate of the goddess Vajrayoginī as a token of respect while the stone shrine of Vāsukināga lying below the temple does not receive much attention. Similarly, when the statue visits Paśupati, Pharping, Panauti and Cāṃgu, its attention is focused on paying respect to the most important shrine of these places, rather than to meet Vāsukināga. In this respect, the remarks of the present priest in Sankhu, Surendra, are more to the point. He said that the visits made by Mādhav Nārāyaṇa to these religiously important places around the Valley are to pay respect to the deities located in those places. In his view, those deities are superior to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, so it is necessary to pay them a visit, but not the other way around. However, he could not explain the choice of these shrines.

It is always the case that a certain deity has his or her territorial boundaries. They cannot travel beyond such an area. For example, during the procession of Vajrayoginī her statues are carried down to the town of Sankhu from her temple. Her procession cannot go beyond the town area. It also seems that her procession to the town once every year is to assert her ritual realm. In the similar manner, we can say that the geographical area covered by the excursions of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is his ritual realm, which he asserts once every year by his excursions. It is also likely that these excursions were initiated to publicise the month-long *vrata* of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa throughout the Valley.

### **Aśvamedha yajña, the concluding fire sacrifice of the fast**

The last day of the festival is very important for the participants, because Aśvamedha yajña, the fire sacrifice, is performed on this day as the final ritual of the *vrata*. On this day, after the procession of the town, the participants gather at Śālinadī to participate in a fire sacrifice, which marks the conclusion of the festival. Although this fire sacrifice is known as Aśvamedha yajña, the ritual instruction text used for the fire sacrifice says it is a Kuṣaṇḍīyajña. The priest Surendra Rājopādhyāy explained that such a fire sacrifice is performed to conclude important fasts.<sup>15</sup> He was, however, unclear why this fire sacrifice began to be called Aśvamedha yajña. He thinks the reason may be to publicize it as of equal importance with the Aśvamedha yajña.

### *The Aśvamedha yajña ritual*

The ceremony is carried out in an open space, also known as the Aśvamedha yajña ground. In the instruction text it is called Yajñamaṇḍap. It is situated about a hundred steps west of the Dhalampu rest house and in front of the open roofed Viṣṇu temple. Year by year, this ground is becoming smaller and smaller because of land erosion. In 1999, the Vajrayoginī VDC took some measures to prevent further erosion by building stonewalls. In 2000, the ritual began at about seven in the evening (19 February). Surendra and his son Subhash Rājopādhyāy were there as Brahmin priests, and Minbahadur and his younger brother Nirbahadur Jośī were there as their assistants, while the Parvate Brahmin who succeeded the Newar Bhaṭṭa Brahmin was also present there, but he had no specific duties to perform.

In the middle of the Yajñamaṇḍap, one of the Jośī priests built a square-shaped fire pit assembling some forty unbaked bricks. Less than a metre west of the fire pit seats for the *kaji* and his wife were placed. The *sābā* members were seated right behind them and some of the participants were seated further behind. Other participants were seated surrounding the fire pit. The participants put mats on the ground as their seats. Each participant had placed his or her basket and a plate with items for ritual in front of the seat on the ground, so that necessary items could be picked up as soon as the priests instructed them to do so. The Brahmin priest Surendra's seat was to the south of the fire pit at a distance of less than a metre. He had his ritual instruction-text in his hand. His son Subhash's seat was placed very close to the fire pit on the west together with the *kaji* and his wife's seats. Seats for the Jośī priests were also placed close to the fire pit on the east. All of them and the participants were facing the fire pit.

The statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa was kept inside the temple of Viṣṇu until certain rituals of the fire sacrifice were completed. Just beneath the temple, a rectangular-shaped platform of unbaked bricks about one and half metres by fifty centimetres was built to place a big earthen jar (*kalaśa*) representing Indra, the god of rain and also representing the reigning king. After the completion of the Aśvamedha yajña ceremony, this jar is carried to the royal palace in Kathmandu as a blessing to the reigning king. It was surrounded by eight small *kalaśa* representing eight mother goddesses (*aṣṭamātṛka*) and two *kalaśa* representing Śiva and Śakti on the left. Each corner of this platform also contained a *kalaśa*. Then ten more *kalaśas* representing the lords of ten directions (*daśadikpāla*) were placed close to the southwestern corner while one hundred and eight other *kalaśas* were placed on its north. All these jars were painted with various religious symbols by a traditional artist (Pum)

and filled with water, five varieties of leaves (*pañcapallava*) and red coloured cotton flags. A three-tiered small cotton umbrella was thrust into the mouth of the Indra *kalaśa* with a stick and its mouth covered with an earthen plate containing a coconut surrounded by its fibrous outer covering. The *kalaśa* belonging to Śiva and Śakti also had three tiered flags. For a ritual installation of all these *kalaśa*, the young priest worshipped them in between the fire sacrifice while Surendra was reading out some of the passages from his text to instruct him. All the participants also brought several *kalaśas* with them to be consecrated. They later distributed these among their relatives, neighbours and friends, as a blessing from Mādhav Nārāyaṇa.

The young priest, Subhash, began the worship with *pañcagavya*, a mixture of honey, cow dung, purified butter, cow milk and yoghurt as the first ritual of the ceremony. Then he sprinkled this mixture on all the participants. Surendra explained that this was to purify the participants and the things to be used for the fire sacrifice. As soon as the sprinkling of *pañcagavya* was finished, Subhash performed a *bali pūjā*, the offering of a portion of food (*samaybaji*), which includes boiled meat, fried egg and fish to ward off evil spirits (*bhut pret*). A few metres south of the fire pit on an unbaked brick a small earthen pot was placed with a three-tiered cotton black umbrella on top for the purpose of *bali pūjā*. This worship is also called the worship of Yama, the god of death. Only this worship contains meat - otherwise the whole ceremony of Aśvamedha yajña is vegetarian. Surendra and a Jośī priest kept reciting mantras. In the meantime, Subhash, the young priest, prepared himself to light the fire in the pit. First, he attached a piece of five-coloured thread (*pasukā*) around the fire pit, then lit the fire with a bundle of wood on a *sukundā* lamp. A tripod made of reeds was placed over the fire pit and a copper bowl with a pointed bottom with a small hole in it was put inside the tripod. The copper pot contained purified butter (ghee), which began dripping into the fire as soon as it was heated. Thirty-two ingredients were displayed close to the fire pit, and the young priest was throwing these into the fire according to instructions he received from Surendra, who was reciting the ritual text indicating how to carry out the appropriate oblations.

During the fire sacrifice the *kaji* carried two *kalaśas*, representing Śiva and Śakti, three times around the Yajñamaṇḍap. When he was walking with these *kalaśas* in his hands, his wife (*kajini*) was walking in front of him touching the *kalaśa* with a key and dropping water from a water pot. Three other ladies were walking ahead of her; two were dropping popped rice on the ground and another was brushing the ground with a broom. Immediately after these *kalaśas* were put in their respective places in the

Yajñamaṇḍap, the statue of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa was carried out of the Viṣṇu temple. Before it was taken inside the Yajñamaṇḍap it was carried around it three times. When the statue was about to enter the Yajñamaṇḍap, the *kajini* offered welcome worship (*lasakusa*) to it.

As soon as the statue entered the courtyard, it was placed on a copper bowl and covered with a piece of white cloth. Then it received a series of ritual baths from the young priest and the *kajini* while Surendra read the ritual text loudly to instruct them how to perform the proper rituals. These baths are called *ṛttikā snāna* or the bathing of earth. The *kajini* poured water over the statue from small earthen pots, while the young priest bathed the statue.

Surendra mentioned names of the *Ṛttikā* baths from his text during the bath.<sup>16</sup> Then ritual baths with *kuśa* grass, medicine (*auśadh*), water from Gaṃgā (*gaṃgājala*), yoghurt, honey, *kalaśas* representing four directions, *pañcagavya* and conches respectively took place. After the bath the *kajini* worshipped the god in a similar welcoming worship. After the worship, the piece of cloth covering the god was removed and the *kajini* placed *ṭikā* and flowers on the god. This is the *garbhādhāna* ceremony, or the impregnation-rite, as Surendra, the chief priest, explained. This ritual is also performed on the last day of the confinement ritual performed for Newar girls (*bārā pikāyegu*).<sup>17</sup> However, during the *bārā pikāyegu* ritual no bathing is carried out, but vermilion is applied to the heads of girls.

As soon as the *garbhādhāna* ceremony concluded, the chief priest lifted the statue from the copper bowl and carried it to its seat in the middle of the courtyard.

The next step was the birth ceremony (*jātakarma*) of the god, then, followed the name-giving ceremony (*nāmakarṇa*), the ceremonial showing of the sun for the first time (*niṣkramaṇa*), the feeding of fruits (*phalaprāśana*), and the feeding of grains (*annaprāśana*). Then followed the shaving ceremony (*cuḍākarṇa*), the initiation of a boy (*batukarṇa*), the initiation rite (*dīkṣāprādāṇama*) and the marriage rites (*vivāha*). This set of rituals is also called *daśakarma kriyā*, or the tenfold initiation rites.<sup>18</sup>

After the completion of *daśakarma kriyā*, the chief and young priests approached the fire pit and repeated the *śloka*s for *daśakarma kriyā* while throwing grains into the fire. The same *śloka*s related to the *daśakarma kriyā* were repeated, while the grains were thrown into the fire. The chief priest explained that it was necessary to repeat the *daśakarma kriyā* rituals to give completeness to the rites. Then the priest continued with another oblation into the fire called *deśāpāti homa* putting grains into the fire in the name of all the important Hindu and Buddhist

deities around the Kathmandu Valley, including all the deities located in the sanctuary of Vajrayoginī and Sankhu.

Finally, black soot was put on their foreheads from an instrument (*homva*) used to perform the oblation into the fire. The priest said that after receiving the soot, the *sābā* members were immediately freed from certain restrictions such as smoking cigarettes, which had been forbidden for the whole month. After the fire sacrifice, they went back to the *yajña* site to perform the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual as the final ritual of the whole ceremony of Aśvamedha *yajña*. The *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual is like the daily ritual at Śālinadī.



Plate 34 The Brahmin priest, Sunil Rājopādhyāy priest presiding over the concluding fire sacrifice (Aśvamedha *yajña*) on the last night of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival (February 1994).

When all the rituals were completed, the participants in the fast offered food (*nislā*) and money to the Rājopādhyāy priests, the Bhaṭṭa priest's successor and the Jośī priests as fees. The amount of money given to each priest was different. The chief priest's food also included a coconut cover, while other priests were only given rice, ghee, molasses, salt, spinach, ginger and lentils. The money fees given to other priests were less than what was given to the chief priest. In most cases, the chief priest received

one hundred and five rupees or more, while other priests received twenty-five or less. The Rājopādhyāy priest, who had presided over the *dhalaṃdanegu* rituals every day at Śālinadī, received additional fees (*dakṣiṇā*) from the participants. Similarly, the chief priest received a lower garment (*dhoti*) from each participant.



Plate 35 Women *vratālu* with the trays, containing items for worship on the last night of their *vrata* at Śālinadī (February 1994).

Towards the end of the *Aśvamedha yajña* all the participants burnt a piece of cloth, which they had used during the fast; this was soaked in ghee and cast into the sacrificial fire. Each of them later collected black soot from the burnt cloth, which they put on their foreheads. Five coloured threads (*pasukā* and *gvaṃkā*), flowers and red *ṭikā* were also used as blessings from the fast. While the participants were busy collecting black soot from the fire, the statue of Mādhava Nārāyaṇa was carried away silently and unnoticed from the site to the house of the Brahmin priest by the young priest.

For women participants, the most important blessing (*prasāda*) from the fast is steamed pastries made of wheat flour called *akṣatāmadhi*. They cook them themselves. All of them carry away one hundred and eight such pastries; one hundred to be consumed by the participants themselves and eight to be handed over either to one's husband or a son. If one is without

husband or son one may give it to a ritual friend's son, or put the eight pastries into the river, praying to the god to fulfil one's wishes. The end of the Aśvamedha yajña is also an opportunity for the participants to choose a ritual friend (*tvāy*) by exchanging *prasād* before the Brahmin priest, and this friendship they keep for their whole life. Then they return home to take their food and rest. Usually the *yajña* ends early in the morning, but in extreme cases it may take a whole night.

### *Significance of the Aśvamedha yajña*

The Aśvamedha yajña can be considered the climax of the month-long *vrata* of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, because it marks the end of the *vrata*. On this occasion all the 330 million deities are invited to be present. The priests and the *vrata* participants worship them. Offering necessary ingredients and foodstuffs to ghosts and spirits is also done to pacify them. By performing all these rituals betterment is expected not only for the *vrata* participants, but also for the whole world and all living beings. Ultimately the goal of all the ritual performed during this occasion is to overcome all difficulties and to achieve peace, tranquillity and happiness for everybody. In this regard the occasion is not only important for the *vrata* participants but also for all living beings.

One of the important aspects of this *yajña* is the process of ritualisation of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. During this process, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa has to pass all sorts of *rite de passage* (*daśakarma*) as a human being in Hindu society, including the impregnation rite (*garvādhana*), birth (*jātakarma*), name-giving (*nāmakarma*), showing the sun (*niṣkramaṇa*), feeding with fruits (*phalaprāśana*), feeding grains (*annaprāśana*), head shaving (*cuḍākarma*), the ritual performed for a boy (*batukaṇa*), ritual initiation (*dikṣāpradanama*) and marriage (*vivāha*). During the process of these rituals, two Brahmin priests remain busy reciting ritual *mantras*, while the *kaji* and *kajini*, the patrons of the ceremony, carry out all the rituals according to their instructions. This ritualisation process is necessary for most of the deities during their annual, twelve-yearly or special ceremonies. At Vajrayoginī, such rituals are conducted once every twelve years for the goddess Hyāuṃkhāḥ māju when she is repainted, while for the goddess Mhāsukhvāḥ māju such rituals are carried out occasionally when she is being renovated. Similar rituals are performed in the case of white Macchendranāth or Karuṇāmaya in Kathmandu too (Locke 1980:208-16). These life cycle rituals performed for deities are taken as the renewal of their lives. As the priest Surendra said, it is necessary in the case of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa because he is kept inside the god house (*dyo*

*chem*) at the Balampu for the whole year and is not allowed to be touched by general public, but when he is carried out during the festival people are allowed to touch him, which makes him unclean and impure, so the renewal of life is necessary to purify him before he is taken back to *dyo chem*.

As the priest said, a *yajña* such as the one carried out on the last day of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is very important to obtain rain, grain and to prevent calamities as well as to give continuity to the lives of being on the earth. The smoke that rises from such a fire sacrifice carries divine power, which drives away all evil powers and calamities. For the participants of the *vrata* it is all the more important, because only after observing this *yajña* is their *vrata* supposed to be completed and they are supposed to obtain merit, which eventually will help them to get their wishes fulfilled. It is therefore necessary that all the participants observe this *yajña*. This is an especially testing day for the women participants. If it happens that any of the women participants have their menstrual period, they are disqualified from observing this *yajña* properly. This means that their month-long observance of the fast is fruitless. The priest thinks this is a kind of punishment for such ladies for their sinful deeds of the past or the mistakes they knowingly or unknowingly have committed during the *vrata*. Every year a few such cases occur. They may repeat the *vrata* again in later years to make it complete.

The burning of a piece of cloth in the fire by each participant is considered to be an important act during this fire sacrifice. They can burn a piece of cloth that they have used during the *vrata*. The burning of the cloth used by the person can be seen as an act of sacrifice. If we may take a classic example, every sacrifice includes the patron or the *yajamāna* as a victim, who is supposed to be reborn through the self-sacrifice. Heesterman discusses the classic example of Prajāpati, who is a sacrificer but also a victim (1993:58). The burning of cloth in the Aśvamedha *yajña* in Sankhu can be linked to same theme.

As has been made clear, this *yajña* performed on the last day of the month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is called Aśvamedha *yajña* or the sacrifice of a horse. It is still widely known by this name. People think it is the most important ritual related to the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival. In particular, people in Sankhu and the participants in the *vrata* regard it as an Aśvamedha *yajña*. However, in practice this *yajña* does not have the nature of a real Aśvamedha *yajña*. As has been stated above, this *yajña* is called a Kuśaṇḍīyajña in the ritual text used for the purpose. As the priest Surendra made clear, such a *yajña* is generally performed to conclude any



important ritual fast. It can therefore be said that although people began to call it an Aśvamedha yajña, it is not so in the true sense.

### **Final ritual bath at the Sundarīghāṭ**

On the morning following the Aśvamedha yajña, all the participants in the fast gather at the Sālkha Mahādev temple complex in Sankhu to take a final ritual bath at the Sundarīghāṭ. After the ritual bath all the participants go home to prepare for the *migāḥ pūjā*, which will take place the same day. The next and last occasion when the participants in the fast gather in front of the Mahādev temple is the day of Silācarhe. The group of Hareśiva (Mādhya) singers who sang devotional songs every morning also come this morning to sing for the last time.

### **Worship of the fire-pit (Migāḥ pūjā)**

A day after the Aśvamedha yajña, another important ritual is organised for the participants of the fast concerns the worship of the fire-pit in which a month-long fire was burning in the Dhalampu rest house and other fire pits used by the women participants. The participants prepare a plate for worship and a feast at their homes. Women participants worship the fire pits in the courtyard of the temple in Śālinadī where they sat around during the month-long fast. Portions of food offered in the fire-pit include beaten rice, beans, cooked potatoes, soybeans and meat. After the worship of the fire-pit the participants are freed from all the restrictions they had been observing during the fast. From this day, they are allowed to consume salt, spices, meat and any other food they like. Close relatives of the participants may accompany them in this worship. These relatives of the participants hand over *sagam* (boiled egg, fish, pieces of boiled meat, cake made of lentil), as a sign of good luck for the participants' relatives after they have finished the worship. Then they eat their meal. This occasion is also to celebrate the successful completion of the *vrata*.

The *kaji* goes with *sābā* members in a group to worship their *migāḥ* in the Dhalampu rest house. The plate for worship is prepared at the *kaji*'s house, but the *kaji*'s wife has to carry out her worship on her own *migāḥ* in the temple compound separately. The *kaji*'s worship also includes a goat sacrifice to the shrine of Vārāhī, one of the eight mother goddesses around Sankhu located next to the temple of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa in Śālinadī. The goat is supplied by the *guthi*. After the sacrifice, they prepare their food in the Dhalampu rest house. The head of the sacrificed goat is divided into eight parts and distributed as *sī* among themselves and the god Mādhav

Nārāyaṇa. The right eye of the goat, which is considered to be the main *sī*, is offered to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and the left eye to the *kaji*, the right ear to Syārbā, the *sābā nāyo*, left ear to Giri, the *me nāyo*. The nose of the goat is given to the Joṣī priest and the right jaw, the left jaw and the tongue to other *sābā* members according to their seniority. The portion of food together with the right eye belonging to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is offered to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa at the foot of his seat at the temple at Śālinadī, although the god has already left.

From this day onwards, the participants begin distributing blessings (*prasād*) from the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa to their relatives, neighbours and friends. They continue to do so for fourteen days. Those relatives and close friends who offered them a meal (*pālaṃ*) during their fast receive a *kalaśa* together with the *prasāda* and are invited for a feast on Silācarhe. On that day, close relatives and friends bring them *sagaṃ*, the ritual offering of boiled eggs with fried fish, boiled meat and lentil pastries to wish them good luck. Fire is extinguished in the fire pits because they are now abandoned.

### **Reunion of the participants in Sankhu and a fire sacrifice containing snakes on Silācarhe**

Silācarhe (Śivarātri) is an important day as a festival related to Śiva celebrated by the Hindus in Nepal. On this day, Paśupati, the most important Hindu temple in Nepal, receives a great number of visitors, not only from Nepal but also from many parts of India. Many people in Sankhu also visit Paśupati or other important Śiva temples. On behalf of every quarter in Sankhu a fire is burnt in front of the Gaṇeśa shrine till late at night or the whole night to honour Śiva. For this purpose, teenagers and young children begin collecting wood from every house in their quarter. In the evening they may also steal wood anywhere. Although it is Śivarātri or Śiva's night, his son Gaṇeśa is also worshipped with great respect. People believe that singing devotional songs dedicated to Lord Śiva and spending this night awake will please him and bring them good fortune. This night fried grains like maize, rice, wheat, peas, peanuts, and soybeans are eaten. In every household too, people prepare these ingredients and worship a fire pot (*makāḥ*).

In Sankhu, Śivarātri is especially important for those people who participated in the month-long fast of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. On this day, the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi* organises a fire sacrifice at Sādhukolāṃ where Bramhāyaṇī, one of the eight mother goddesses is located.<sup>19</sup> In the past, all the responsibilities for the preparation of the fire sacrifice belonged to the

*thekedār* who used to run the *guthi*, but since the latter has abandoned his duty the responsibility has been taken over by the Vajrayoginī VDC. However, the person who takes part in the fast as *kaji* takes the moral responsibility for the fire sacrifice because people believe that if the fire sacrifice is not performed properly, one might lose the merits one may have gained from the fast and may even suffer misfortune. When the fire sacrifice was organised by the *thekedār*, Pañyāju, the person who took care of the Taleju temple and deities' daily worship used to carry the plate (*kota*) for worship from the *thekedār*'s home. He also used to perform the *yajamāna*'s duty, but nowadays the plate is prepared at the *kaji*'s home and he himself has to carry it to the sacrificial site and perform the role of *yajamāna*. The *sābā* members accompany him. A Vajrācārya priest from Sankhu performs priestly tasks. In the past, a Karmācārya priest from Kathmandu, who also performed the sacrifice of serpents at the Indrāyaṇī temple, used to perform priestly tasks, but since his death his son has stopped performing them in Kathmandu as well as in Sankhu. So the *thekedār* in Sankhu began hiring Karmācārya priests from other places. When the *thekedār* himself abandoned his duties, the Vajrayoginī VDC began to hire a local Vajrācārya priest for this purpose. For a few years, a Newar Bhaṭṭa Brahmin from Cāṃgu also performed priestly tasks during this fire sacrifice, but since he stopped the Vajrācārya priest has continued these tasks.

Usually, the sacrificial team leaves for the fire sacrifice early in the evening. On its way to the Sādhukolām, people add rice and coins on the worship plate. In the past, a group of Jogi musicians and a pair of butcher's musicians used to accompany the team till they crossed the Makhamtvācā canal outside the Sālkhā Mahādeva gate, but these musicians stopped coming since the mid 1980s. As soon as the team arrives at Sādhukolām, the members worship Bramhāyaṇī with a goat sacrifice. Then fire is kindled close to the shrine by the *kaji*. Together with the sacrificed goat's head, a serpent, a fish and a sparrow are put into the fire while another serpent, a fish and a sparrow are set free.

A Dyolā family in Sankhu is employed by the *guthi* to find snakes for this purpose. However, in the recent past he could not supply snakes every year, so the fire sacrifice had to be carried out without snakes. In 2000, there were no snakes available for the sacrifice. After the completion of the fire sacrifice, *ṭikā* and flowers are distributed as blessings to those who attend the rituals. The team also eats *samaybaji* afterwards, which includes pieces of meat from the neck of the sacrificed goat. The body of the sacrificed goat is carried to the *kaji*'s home to be served in a feast to the *sābā* members and to his own family members the same evening. After the

feast, they spend the night in front of the Sāikhā Mahādev temple. All the participants in the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa fast must come to spend the night there. This is the last reunion for the participants in the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa fast that year. Singing devotional songs and eating fried grains, they stay awake the whole night. A fire is burnt there for the whole night. Early in the morning, they pay respect to the goddess Vajrayoginī. This is the final obligation of the participants in the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa fast before they leave for their homes.

## Conclusion

It has become clear from our discussion that the month-long Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival is the second most important festival of the town. It is also clear from our discussion that the month-long fast of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is one of the most popular fasts observed by the people of the Valley. Although a similar fast of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is observed in Bhaktapur, outsiders do not attend it like the one observed in Sankhu. The most interesting aspect of the *vrata* observed in Sankhu is its recognition as a festival derived from the legendary Svasthānī. However, from my investigation it appeared that its connection with the legend Svasthānī is due to nothing more than a coincidence of these two *vratas* observed in the same month. To associate Lāvanya desa with Sankhu is more a recent invention derived from Svasthānī than a tradition based on historical evidence. How the river received the name Śālinadī in the Svasthānī is still a mystery, because its old Sanskrit name is Nārāyaṇī and for the people in Sankhu it is just Nārī still today.

Some stones that people now began to worship, as various deities mentioned in the Svasthānī had nothing to do with the Svasthānī. One recent example is the recognition of a stone just across the river Śālinadī as Navarāj, the mythical king found in Svasthānī. Up to 1986, this stone was just lying there without any designation, and it was never worshipped. It was in 1987 that a local Chipā, whose paddy field is next to the stone, designated it as Navarāj, the legendary king of Svasthānī. This has now become one of his sources of income. Similarly, a large stone situated in the middle of the river Śālinadī, which local people still worship as Vāsukināga, now began to be recognised as Harihara, an epithet of half-Śiva half-Viṣṇu, by the Kānpaṭṭā Yogi, who guards it during the festival month for his income. Many old people in Sankhu still recall the first invention of this kind around the Śālinadī. This was the identification of a stone situated about two hundred metres south of the river as Candrāvātī, the sinful wife of king Navarāj from the legend of Svasthānī. Many people

in Sankhu now fear that the proposed building of a Svasthānī temple at Śālinadī might in the end cause the importance of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* to decline.

One of the main reasons behind the popularity of the Svasthānī is the tradition of recitating it every day for a month in every home. In the past, it used to be recited only among the Newars, but later as its printed versions appeared in Khas-Nepali it received a wider audience. Furthermore it also succeeded in receiving attention from modern media such as television and radio, which helped greatly in increasing its popularity in recent years.

The followers of the cult of Viṣṇu and those of the cult of Śiva had entirely different ways for centuries. The identification of Viṣṇavism and Śaivism as two branches of Hinduism is not an ancient phenomenon. For centuries, these two competed fiercely and opposed each other. The traditions of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and Svasthānī fasts began a few centuries ago when such competition still existed. It is likely that these two fasts were initiated separately to compete with each other. There are clear indications that both had independent identities. This becomes clear when we look at the ritual instruction text used to perform the daily ritual at the Śālinadī for Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and the ritual instructions provided by the Svasthānī. They are entirely different. Not only the Rājopādhyāy priests who perform the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* in Sankhu, Bhaktapur, Paśupati and Pharping, but also many old people in Sankhu do not regard these two *vrata* as one. Although the legend of Svasthānī began to give rise to many interpretations and explanations throughout its centuries old history, the first Svasthānī text indicates precisely the god and goddess to be meditated on during this *vrata*. They are none other than Śiva himself and his spouse Pārvatī. So people began to imagine a figure of both of these, combined as one. Svasthānī is identified more as a female deity; the first Svasthānī precisely identifies her as ‘Jagadīśvarī’, or the goddess of the world. However, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is a form of Viṣṇu and clearly a male god. The simultaneous worship of the Svasthānī text and its recitation or being listening to by the participants of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* has created confusion.

When exactly the inclusion of Svasthānī in the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* began is not clear to me. Linda Iltis tried to interpret Mādhav Nārāyaṇa as half Mahādeva and half Nārāyaṇa<sup>20</sup>, but the images of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa which are worshipped in Sankhu and in Bhaktapur are both precisely a figure of Nārāyaṇa or Viṣṇu alone. As I mentioned above, Mādhava is a form of Viṣṇu who is worshipped during the month of Māgha (January-February). A stone statue of Mādhava can also be found in Sankhu,

located at the Dhomaḷamahādevdhvākā; it was installed in AD 1699. Therefore, the identification of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa as a god half-Mahādeva and half-Nārāyaṇa does not fit the iconographic details of the image of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa.

The Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* is a mass event, and the participants need to spend the whole month in Sankhu, while the Svasthānī *vrata* can be observed individually while staying in one's own home. The *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual contains a series of activities to honour the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa that is performed everyday at the Śālinadī, but no mention of Svasthānī is to be found. The daily procession of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa through the town of Sankhu, as well as the daily processions of participants offering water from *sahasradhārā* to all the important deities in Sankhu is another important component of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata*. On the day of Lagalāsaptamī, the festive procession goes through the town, and this is again a specific feature of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* performed in the town and attracts a great number of spectators to Sankhu. Such processions or festive occasions are not to be found in the Svasthānī *vrata*.

The priests and the *sābā* members claim that Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is a most compassionate god, who always bestows on people anything they want. In particular he is considered to be capable of awarding his devotees with an appropriate spouse and offspring. In this respect, he can be considered a god of fertility. Not only do the participants in the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *vrata* in Sankhu anticipate gaining merit from the *vrata*, but by offering food, fruits, cloths and money to the participants, visitors also share in this. An impressive scene is the crowd of devotees pouring into Sankhu to pay their respects and to present offerings to Mādhav Nārāyaṇa every day. As stated above, the participants as well as the devotees who offer food, fruits, cloth or money hope to have their wishes fulfilled.

The month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is also an opportunity for many local individuals as well as outsiders to make money. In 2000, it appeared that not only people of Sankhu were doing business in Sankhu, but also many people from the Tarāi and from Bihar in India. Several of them opened small stalls to sell items for worship; many set up temporary teashops and snack shops. An owner of a tea-cum-snack shop said he earned three to fifteen thousand rupees per day in 2000. During the festival, many stalls are also opened around the Śālinadī to provide entertainment for children. In 2000, two schools and one individual set up temporary car parking. One who arranged a space for parking in his potato field close to Śālinadī said that he earned about eighty thousand during the month of the festival. From a business point of view, this festival has become rewarding for the people in Sankhu. Many volunteer associations

like Śālinadī Sudhār Samiti, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Vrata Sevā Samiti and Friends of Sankhu use this occasion to raise funds from the pilgrims.

It can be assumed that during the festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa the protagonists try to present Sankhu as the centre of a large ritual network. Every year, the festival attracts participants and pilgrims from various settlements around the Valley and beyond. Because of the festival, Sankhu can be considered an important destination for religiously minded people. The excursions of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa and the *vrata* participants to different places of the Valley are important features of this festival. These trips show the ritual realm of the worship and reverence for Mādhav Nārāyaṇa. Not only at the private level, but also at the level of the state, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa receives respect. When Mādhav Nārāyaṇa journeys to Pharping he is received with great respect at the Hanumāṇdhokā, the ancient royal palace of Nepal. There he receives worship offered on behalf of the reigning king. Although the king is believed to be an incarnation of Viṣṇu, he requires a blessing from the god Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, which enables him to rule his country without obstacles. He may be possessed with divine power, but he is not so powerful as to be allowed to ignore or disrespect the god. As we discussed above, when Mādhav Nārāyaṇa was denied entry to the Nārāyaṇahitī royal palace, the king had to pay the price of it. He did not lose his crown but his power was curtailed substantially as a result of a people's movement in 1990. The divine power of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa is not a matter to be challenged, either by the ordinary people or by the king. So we can say that the excursions made by Mādhav Nārāyaṇa during the festival are in a way the assertion of his power throughout his realm.

The people of Sankhu consider the festival of Vajrayoginī as their most important festival, but if we look at the ritual network of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival it does not seem to be of lesser importance to the town. Especially from the viewpoint of attracting outsiders, it may well be considered the most important festival. However, this festival is exclusively of a Brahmanic nature, which excludes certain castes of Newar society. The priest who presides over the daily rituals during the *vrata* is a Brahmin, while in the festival of Vajrayoginī, although only the Buddhist Vajrācāryas play the role of priests, all the Newar castes of the town are involved. Compared to the Vajrayoginī festival, the community of Sankhu is involved to a lesser extent during the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa festival. This is the significant difference between these two major festivals. This festival also shows religious creativity, the process of:

- linking actuality with a mythical past;
- appropriation of religious elements by the local community; and

- sanctification of space.

These testify perhaps to a typical Newar dynamism and creativity. In this way the whole Valley becomes a religious or ritual universe. It is a typical Newar festival because of the free interchange of Hindu, Saivites, Vaiṣṇavites and Buddhist elements.



# CHAPTER THIRTEEN

## THE CULT OF THE GODDESS VAJRAYOGINĪ AND HER SANCTUARY

### Introduction

It has become clear from our treatment of the legend of Mañisaila Mahāvādāna that the goddess Vajrayoginī, the creator of the realm of Sankhu, is the most important goddess for the people of Sankhu. She is also one of the major Buddhist deities of Nepal. In this Chapter, a brief historical background of the goddess and her sanctuary will be provided. In this context I will present relevant notes from unpublished chronicles as well as inscriptions I found in the sanctuary. The major focus of this Chapter will be on the presentation of the physical features of the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. Then the significance of the goddess and the daily rituals performed at the sanctuary and the role of the priests will be discussed. I will also present data on the twelve-yearly repainting of the fixed statue of the red-faced goddess Vajrayoginī, and the incidental renovation of the processional statue of the yellow-faced goddess Vajrayoginī.

### Historical background

The temple of the goddess Vajrayoginī is situated just above the town of Sankhu to the north, on the edge of the forest. People in Sankhu still use the name “Guṃ Vihāra” or “Guṃ bāhāḥ”, “forest monastery”, for the area containing a number of shrines in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. According to the late Nepalese historian Dhanavajra Vajrācārya, the sanctuary is the oldest and the most prestigious Buddhist monastery of Nepal (Vajrācārya 1972:22-25 and Slusser 1982:166). The word *guṃ* stands for forest in the Newar language. The fact that the word “*guṃ*” means “forest” in present-day Newar was reason enough for Dhanavajra Vajrācārya to attribute a “Kirāta” origin to Guṃ Vihāra. Nepalese historians assert that the Kirātas ruled Nepal before it was ruled by the Licchavis (4th to 9th century). They

did not leave any written documents, ruins of palaces, any religious or other monuments to prove their existence. However, all the chronicles, including the fourteenth century Gopālarājavaṃśavalī, the oldest chronicle of Nepal, give the lists of Kirāta rulers (Vajrācārya & Malla 1985).

The earliest mention of “Guṃ Vihāra” is found in an inscription of a king Aṃśuvarma at Hādīgāon in northeastern Kathmandu dated AD 600 (32 Aṃśuvarman Saṃvat era), in the context of the king’s donations to various important shrines of those days (D. Regmi 1983b:46). The place where it is situated is not mentioned in the inscription, but John Locke concludes that a consistent tradition down through the ages leaves no doubt that this is indeed the Guṃ bāhāḥ of Sankhu. However, at the sanctuary there are no written documents to be found from the Licchavī period. In Locke’s view, ‘Guṃ bāhāḥ’ is the only extant *bāhāḥ* of which the foundation can be traced to a known Licchavi period with some degree of certainty (Locke 1985:467). According to the archaeologist Sukrasagar Shrestha, some of the stones laid below the present temple of Vajrayoginī (Hyāuṃkḥvāḥ māju) are of monolithic style. According to his analysis, four *caityas* standing around the Vajrayoginī sanctuary are also of a similar style from the Licchavi time.<sup>1</sup> The Gopālarājavaṃśavalī records that king Mānadeva observed a penance on the hillock of Guṃvihāra, and by the merit of his penance, a great Buddhist *caitya* (*cibhā*) emerged on the hillock (Vajrācārya & Malla 1985:123).<sup>2</sup> Nowadays ‘Guṃ Vihāra’ is called Vajrayoginī<sup>3</sup> by those not living in Sankhu. They refer specifically to the red-faced and the yellow-faced mothers who are called Hyāuṃkḥvāḥ māju and Mhāsukḥvāḥ māju by the people of Sankhu. Tāmāṅg also refers to the goddess(es) as the red-faced and the yellow-faced mothers.

The legend MM, MMC and other hand-written chronicles found in Sankhu record that the Vajrayoginī Mountain contains nine ponds (*guṃgu kuṇḍa*), nine caves (*guṃgu pāku*) and nine monasteries (*guṃgu Vihāra*). For this reason many people also assume that it comes from the word “Gu” or “nine”, hence ‘Guṃbāhāḥ’ or place of nine monasteries (Sharma 1996).

Whether the word ‘Guṃ’ is derived from the Sanskrit word ‘Guṇa’ is another question. Considering the tradition of giving Sanskrit names to Buddhist monasteries, such speculation cannot be completely ruled out. As far as written documents can prove, Guṃbāhāḥ was already clearly mentioned as “Guṃ Vihāra”, but not as “Guṇa Vihāra”, during the Licchavī time, when the writing of inscriptions in standard Sanskrit was a tradition. At the same time, Guṃbāhāḥ received a Sanskrit name “Padmagiri Dharma Dhātu Mahāvihāra”, which makes it unlikely that the

name comes from Guṇa Vihāra. The deities in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary are still known as ‘Gumbāhāḥ dyo’ or ‘Gubhā dyo,’ the ‘deities of the forest monastery.’

The Vajrayoginī sanctuary is a great pilgrimage site for both Hindu and Buddhist people. In the introduction to his *History of Nepal*, Daniel Wright loosely speaks of the ‘Hinduization of Vajrayoginī’ (Wright 1972:35). The sanctuary draws pilgrims from all over Nepal and beyond (for example from India, Tibet and Japan).

During the so-called Dark Ages between the Licchavi rule and the start of the Malla dynasty at the end of the 13th century, royal support for the Guṇ Vihāra continued. Source materials are scarce, but descendants of the Thakujūjus, the kings or nobles who ruled Kathmandu in medieval times, still worship Vajrayoginī as the deity of choice (*iṣṭadevatā*). During the Malla dynasty, Pratap Malla embellished the Vajrayoginī temple in 1655 (775 NS). We are not exactly sure what the shrine of Vajrayoginī looked like earlier, but a note in the MMC tells us that Pratap Malla demolished the old temple in order to reconstruct it in 1651 (771 NS). Only in AD 1712 that king Bhaskar Malla’s mother, Bhuvanlakṣmī inaugurated the pagoda-type temple that exists today. The SSS relates that the *gaṭakuti* temple built by king Pratap Malla was pulled down and a three storeyed temple was built (see folio 46a). A copper plate in the collection of a Vajrācārya priest at Sankhu tells that king Jagajjaya Malla and his wife offered a golden roof to the Vajrayoginī temple on Māgha Śudi 15, 1725 (845 NS).

The importance of Gumbāhāḥ/Vajrayoginī did not diminish either when the Malla period came to an end with Prithivinarayan Shah’s conquest of the Kathmandu Valley in 1768/69. Many other inscriptions as well as the SSS, and the other chronicles found in Sankhu, record that several kings after Prithivinarayan, such as Singhapratap Shah, Ranabahadur Shah, Rajendravikram Shah, Surendra Vikram and regents like queen Rajendralakṣmī<sup>4</sup>, as well as members of the Rana family, provided land and money to carry out religious activities at Vajrayoginī. The Rana rulers even chose Vajrayoginī as their *iṣṭadevatā*. An inscription dated 1895 (VS 1952) inscribed on the fascia of an eave of the second roof of the temple tells that the prime minister Bir Shamser Janga Bahadur Rana replaced tiles (Nep.: *jhimgaṭi*) with brass sheets.<sup>5</sup>

### Inscriptions from the Vajrayoginī Sanctuary

Inscriptions are considered to be one of the major sources of history. Most of the inscriptions found at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary provide a

picture of religious acts performed by pious people. We found 52 inscriptions in the sanctuary (see below table 20). It will be appropriate to discuss them briefly here in order to provide a general view of these inscriptions. It is interesting to note that except for two copperplates related to environmental protection, all other inscriptions are related in one way or other to religious acts of the people of Sankhu or Kathmandu. Ten inscriptions appeared to be installed by royal houses, by the kings, regents, and Rana prime ministers, while the ordinary people installed all the other inscriptions. Most of them, however, mention the reigning kings of the time. Among these inscriptions eight are in Sanskrit, fourteen are in mixed Sanskrit and Newar, eleven are in Newar, eight are in Khas-Nepali and five are in mixed Sanskrit and Nepali languages. It is also notable that except for a few inscriptions found in the sanctuary all others are written in the Newar script and dated mostly in Nepal era (NS). It was found that twenty-four inscriptions used the Nepal era only, twelve used the Vikram era (VS) only, two used the Sāke and Vikram eras, two used the Nepal, Sāke and Vikram eras and the most recent one dated 2002 used the Nepal, Vikram and Christian eras. Three inscriptions are undated and the dates of two are unreadable. We shall discuss the contents and nature of these inscriptions below.

The oldest inscription found at the stone spout in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary is dated 1168 (288 NS) and is in Sanskrit. This inscription tells that a pious man installed the waterspout wishing for rebirth and salvation from the sufferings of hell for his deceased mother, father and son during the reign of king Rudradeva. Another epigraph on a stone slab from the Vajrayoginī sanctuary dated AD 1172 (293 NS) is the second earliest document written in the Nepalbhasa. This epigraph consists of one sentence in the Nepalbhasa:

Vaṃ Svasa Gvala adhika Saṃvat nyaśrasa ragupati Rudradeva rājā  
vijayparatvaṃ (In the year two hundred and ninety-three during the reign  
of king Rudradeva) (ESR 1972:3-4 and Tamot 1977:12.

Dilliraman Regmi provides a Devanāgarī transcription of two copperplates and a stone inscription from the Vajrayoginī sanctuary.<sup>6</sup> Dhanavajra Vajrācārya and Tekbahadur Shrestha have one inscription from the Sanctuary in their collection (1986:306-309). Shankarman Rajvamsi gives a descriptive index of eight inscriptions from the Sanctuary,<sup>7</sup> but three of the inscriptions found in his index were no longer traceable during my copying. Besides these few published inscriptions, all the other inscriptions are being discussed here for the first time. Three inscriptions included in Rajvamsi's index are from the stone taps situated northeast of

the Vajrayoginī temple and dated 1595 (715 NS), 1705 (825 NS) and 1843 (963 NS). Among these three inscriptions, I could only trace the first one, dated 1595, but not the last two. One inscription that was found above the wall of a tap is dated 1705 (825 NS), but it is a different one from that recorded by Rajvamsi. Another inscription found on the right of the temple entrance is dated 1725 (845 NS) and mentions that by the grace of king Jagajjaya Malla of Kathmandu, the people of Sankhu killed sixteen assailants from Bhaktapur and handed over 17 to Kathmandu (Rajvamsi 1963:33-4).

Two copperplate inscriptions from the sanctuary, dated 1729 (849 NS) and 1752 (872 NS), prohibit people from cutting down green trees in the forests around Sankhu and from killing jackals, monkeys and serpents. In a modern sense, both these inscriptions are concerned with environmental protection, but in the past these may have had a religious meaning.<sup>8</sup>

Two inscriptions carry the same date of Āśāḍha 1655 (775 NS). The first tells of the construction by king Pratap Malla of the Vajrayoginī temple, and the offering of a pinnacle followed by a song of praise (*śloka me*) to Vajrayoginī. It also mentions the installation of a golden statue of his wife and others at the Sanctuary.<sup>9</sup> The second inscription gives a list of land endowments and financial arrangements made to the Sakhāykhalaḥ *guthi* to carry out daily worship at the temple of Vajrayoginī and Jogeśvara (*Caitya bharāda*). It also gives a list of items needed for worship. This inscription gives instructions to perform the offering of a fire sacrifice at Vajrayoginī four days before the full-moon day of Caitra. A stone inscription kept inside the temple of Jogeśvara *caitya* dated 1661 (781 NS) tells of the installation of a statue of Vajrasatva, a Buddhist deity, at the sanctuary in memory of late Dhanasimha by his mother and a brother.<sup>10</sup> An inscription found at the Mahākāla Bhairava dated 1663 (783 NS) tells of the offering of lion statues to the Bhairava.

Two identical inscriptions dated 1782 (902 NS) were found, one in front of the rock cave situated to the northwest of the Vajrayoginī temple, and another to the northeast of the temple. Both these inscriptions tell of the installation of a rest place (*sataḥ*) and of financial arrangements made for *guthi* to look after the rest place and to worship the goddess Vajrayoginī and other deities around the sanctuary. Another inscription dated 1785 (905 NS) found on the stone steps behind the Vajrayoginī temple also mentions the setting up of a rest place. The inscriptions dated 1817 (937 NS) and 1849 (969 NS) recount the financial arrangements made to worship deities around the sanctuary. An inscription dated 1725 (845 NS) contains a few words praising Vajrayoginī and mentions king

Jagajjya's name, while an inscription dated 1846 (NS 966) tells of the installation of gilded lions at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary.

Five inscriptions found at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary are in mixed Sanskrit and Nepali, while eight are in Nepali. One of them, dated 1799 (1856 VS) and inscribed above the main gate of the Vajrayoginī temple, mentions the offering of a golden gate and its door including the tympanum to Vajrayoginī by queen Rājarājeśvarī Devī, king Ranabahadur Shah's first wife. The second inscription dated 1844 (1766 Śāke and 1901 VS) mentions the financial arrangements made to buy items for worship at the sanctuary. A copperplate inscription dated 1817 (1874 VS) tells about the founding of a *guthi*, and an undated copperplate tells about the initiation of another *guthi* to feed Brahmins.

An inscription dated 1958 (1078 NS) mentions the installation of a Buddhist *caitya* and the laying of paving stones around the Dharmadhātu *caitya* by the family members of the late Bhājuratna, a noted trader from Kathmandu who had business connections with Tibet. One more inscription below a stone *caitya* is from the same year, 1958 (1078 NS), but it is without any explanation except the date. These two are the earliest inscriptions in Devanāgarī script to be found at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, but both are in Newar language with Nepal Samvat. The most recent inscription in Devanāgarī script and in the Khasa language is at the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju and is dated 1996 (2053 VS). It tells about the restoration (*lampuṃ chāyegu*) of processional statues of Vajrayoginī and *Caitya* (*cibhā*) and gives a list of individuals who made donations in cash or in kind. Before this inscription was installed, an inscription dated 1979 (2036 VS), which mentions the installation of a *caitya* at the sanctuary, was the most recent inscription in Nepali.

**Table 20 A list of inscriptions found in the Vajrayoginī Sanctuary**

	AD & Dated Era	Subject	Languages
1.	1168 (288 NS)	On the right face of waterspout located in the middle of the three waterspouts in the sanctuary.	Sanskrit
2.	1172 (293 NS, Phālguṇa Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭamī))	The earliest inscription found written in Newar language.	Newar
3.	1655 (775 NS, Āsādha Śukla 7)	Installation of temple by Pratap Malla	Skt. and Newar
4.	1655 (775 NS Āsādha Śukla Saptamī Friday)	Endowment made to a <i>guthi</i> to perform worship/ on Jogeśvara temple plinth	Newar

5.	1661 (781 NS, Baisākha Śukla Purnemā, Thursday)	Installation of Vajrasatva on the plinth of the temple of Jogeśvara caitya. Kept in the temple.	Newar
6.	1663 (783 NS, Caitra Śukla 5, Thursday)	Offering of lions statues at Bhairava	Newar
7.	1725 (845 NS)	A verse dedicated to Vajrayoginī by king Jagajjaya	Sanskrit
8.	1725 (845 NS, Pauṣa Kṛṣṇa 10 Monday)	Assailants from Bhaktapur killed and founding of a <i>guthi</i> /on the right side of the Vajrayoginī temple	Newar
9.	1725 (845 NS, Māgha Śudi 15)	Offering of golden roof to Vajrayoginī temple and land endowment made by king Jagajjaya Malla and his wife	Newar
10.	1729 (849 NS)	Toraṇa (at the right side of the main <i>torāṇa</i> )	Newar
11.	1752 (782 NS, Āṣāḍha Śudi 1 Saṃkrānti Wednesday)	On the left side of the <i>torāṇa</i>	Skt. and Newar
12.	From the time of king Jayprakash	Mhutapau middle roof Vajrayoginī. Temple southern side	Skt.
13.	1782 AD (902 NS, Phālgun Śudi 3)	Installation of a <i>sataḥ</i> next to the cave	Skt. and Newar
14.	1785 (905 NS, Jeṣṭha Śukla Purnimā)	Construction of a rest place ( <i>sataḥ</i> )	Skt. and Newar
15.	1782 (902 NS, Phālgun Śudi 3)	Construction of a <i>sataḥ</i> next to cave	Skt. and Newar
16.	1782 (902 NS, Phālgun Śudi 3)	Construction of a <i>sataḥ</i>	Skt. and Newar
17.	1800 (920 NS, Sāke 1721, VS 1856 Mārga Sīra Śukla Daśamī Friday)	Rājrajyasvarī <i>torāṇa</i> inscription	Sanskrit and Khas-Nepali
18.	1817 (1874 VS Baisākha Śudi Akṣay Tṛtiyā)	Formation of a <i>guthi</i>	Khas-Nepali
19.	1817 (937 NS, Baisākha Kṛṣṇa 15, Friday)	Formation of a <i>guthi</i> for daily offerings at the temple	Skt. and Newar
20.	1824 (944 NS Śrāvaṇ Badi 13 Sunday)	On a bell installation to the right of the temple	Skt. and Newar
21.	1824 (944 NS Āśvina Kṛṣṇa Dvādaśī Saturday)	Offering of gilded copper lions.	Skt. and Newar
22.	1844 (1901 VS, Śrāvaṇ, Śudi 15 Tuesday)	Formation of a worship <i>guthi</i>	Skt. and Nepali

23.	1845 (965 NS)	<i>Mhutapau</i> Jogeśvara temple	Skt. and Newar
24.	King Surendra Vikram Shah's time)	<i>Mhutapau</i> middle roof eastern side	Skt.
25.	n.d.	<i>Mhutapau</i> middle roof northern side	Skt.
26.	n.d.	<i>Mhutapau</i> middle roof western side	Skt.
27.	1846 (966 NS, Āśvina Kṛṣṇa Dvādaśī Saturday)	Gilded Lions	Skt. and Newar
28.	1847 (1769 Śāke, VS 1847)	<i>Mhutapau</i> middle roof west	Khas-Nepali
29.	1849 (969 NS, Kārtik Śudi 8)	Founding of worship <i>guthi</i>	Skt. and Newar
30.	1855 (1912 VS, Māgha Śudi 8 Friday)	Below the second floor window of Vajrayoginī temple).	Skt. and Newar
31.	1856 (976 NS, 1778 Śāke, 1913 VS, Kārtik)	Embossed inscription on a warning bell	Nepali
32.	1863 (1920 VS)	Offering of a bell	Skt. and Khas-Nepali
33.	1895 (1952 VS, Kārtik Śudi 11 Tuesday)	Replacing the tile roof with brasssheets on Vajrayoginī temple by Bir Shamser Janga Bahadur Rana (written on <i>mhutapau</i> of the lower roof in southern facade).	Khas-Nepali
34.	1903 (1960 VS, Āśāḍha, Śudi 8 Thursday),	Offering of silver inside the temple by <i>rājguru</i> Hemraj's family (eastern most front facade of the temple).	Khas-Nepali.
35.	Unknown (symbolic date written in alphabets?)	On a <i>Mhutapau</i> inscription	Skt.
36.	1917 (1974 VS, Phālguna Kṛṣṇa 13 Sunday)	Inscribed on <i>jhallar</i> on <i>Mhutapau</i> of the top roof, Vajrayoginī	Khas-Nepali
37.	1920 (1977 VS, Baisākha Śukla 9, Wednesday)	Halampau (eaves fascia with frills) inscription of middle roof gilded	Khas-Nepali
38.	1921 (1978 VS, Baisākha)	Offering of a bell on the west of Vajrayoginī	Sanskrit
39.	1924 (1044 NS, Kārtik Śudi 15 Friday)	On a <i>patā</i>	Newar
40.	1941 (1998 VS, Kārtik Śukla)	Prime minister Bhim Shamser's offering of a bell	Sanskrit
41.	1958 (1078 NS)	Installation of a <i>caitya</i> and the paving of stone in the temple square by Bhajuratna's family	Newar



42.	1979 (2036 VS, Phālguna 25 Saturday)	Installation of a caitya	Khas-Nepali
43.	Undated	The second from the right of the toraṇa V. Temple (Survira Rana's family's <i>guthi</i> to feed Brahmins)	Skt. and Nepali
44.	Undated	Installation of the Sorahāte Gaṇeśa	Newar
45.	Undated	Installation of a caitya	Newar
46.	Unreadable	Behind the stone lion on the temple plinth of Vajrayoginī	
47.	Unreadable	Beside the waterspout situated just below the 108 steps	
48.	Unreadable	At the same waterspout situated below the 108 steps	
49	1987 (2044-12-20 VS)	At Mhasukhvāhmāju temple	
50	1988 (1108 NS)	At Mhasukhvāhmāju temple, paving of bricks on the floor	Newar
51	1999 (2056 VS)	A list of donors to Vajrayoginī Seva Samiti. On a wall surrounded to the Vajrayoginī temple	Khas-Nepali
52	2002 (1122 NS 2059 VS Guṃlāthva aṣṭmī)	About the restoration of Vajrayoginī temple. Placed on the north of the Jogeśvara temple.	Newar

One inscription found below the statue of a Gaṇeśa at the temple of Vajrayoginī and another below a stone *caitya* give names of the donors, but they are without dates. Two inscriptions that we found, one behind the stone taps and one behind the small lion statue in front of the Vajrayoginī gate, are not readable. Similarly, another inscription placed beneath the stone spout immediately below the one hundred and eight stone steps leading to the temple gate is unreadable.

Some inscriptions are found embossed on bronze bells hanging around the sanctuary. One on the right side of the temple is dated 1824 (944 NS), the big warning bell is dated 1863 (1920 VS), another warning big bell is dated 1856 (976 NS), a bell on the west of the Vajrayoginī temple is dated 1921 (1978 VS), and lastly one at the same site is dated 1941 (1998 VS).

In 1998 and 1999 during the restoration of the Vajrayoginī (Hyāumkhvāh māju) temple several inscriptions were found on each roof of the temple. Five inscriptions were found engraved on the fascias (*mhutapau*) of the eaves of the middle roof of the Vajrayoginī temple: the first one on the southern side is from the time of king Jayprakash Malla, the second one on the east is from the time of king Surendra, the third one is on the northern side, and another two are on the western side, the last

one being dated 1847 (1769 Śāke). As we mentioned before, one inscription on the fascia of the eaves of the lowest roof of the Vajrayoginī temple is dated 1895; this tells about the replacement of tiles with brass sheets from the roof(s?), but it is not clear whether all the three roofs of the temple were covered with brass sheets or only the lowest one. A gilded inscription on the fascia of the eaves with frills (*halampau*) on the middle roof is dated 1820. Another inscription on the long *patā* attached to Vajrayoginī is dated 1924 (1044 NS). Similarly, one on the fascia of the eaves of the Jogeśvara temple roof is dated 1845 (965 NS).

### Physical features of the Vajrayoginī Sanctuary

People climbing the hill to worship the goddess visit both forms of the goddess: the red-painted one (either made of wood or earth) in the main pagoda temple (Hyāumkhvāḥ māju), as well as the processional statue Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, “Yellow-faced mother,” a little above the courtyard of Guṃ Vihāra. The latter, made of wood but covered with gold-plated metal, is considered to be fiercer in appearance, and hence may represent a different deity, rather than being a double of the Red-faced mother.

For our purposes we use the name “Guṃbāhāḥ” or “Vajrayoginī sanctuary” for the whole area of Vajrayoginī that covers Guṃgaṇeśa situated to the north of the courtyard of the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju and its courtyard, the temple of Vajrayoginī (Hyāumkhvāḥ māju), the temple of Jogeśvara (*Caitya* Bhagavān) and its courtyard (*jagati*) and the shrine of Mahākāla situated to the southwest of the temple complex at a distance of about three hundred steps (see map: 14 Guṃbāhāḥ (Vajrayoginī) sanctuary). The Vajrayoginī sanctuary covers a large area with temples, *caityas*, and images of different gods and goddesses.

### The temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju

The processional statue of Vajrayoginī, whom we call Mhāsukhvā māju (yellow faced-mother), is also called Ekjaṭī Buddhimātā.

Together with her statue, other processional statues of Siṃhinī, Byāghrinī and a *Caitya* god (*cibhā dyo*) are kept in the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, which is situated at about fifty steps to the north from the pagoda-style Vajrayoginī (Hyāumkhvāḥ māju) temple. The Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple is not in the pagoda style.

Its structure is like a two-storeyed Newar house with three floors and an open rooftop (*kaḥsi*). An old picture shows that the building was in the





Plate 36 An archival picture of the Mhāsukhvā māju temple with three pinnacles on its top.

A priest told me that the old structure was destroyed by a big fire and rebuilt in its present shape. As a chronicle tells us, there was a great fire at the temple of Mhāsu khvāḥ māju on Friday, 7 Pauṣa Badi 1915 (NS 1035).<sup>11</sup> The present temple of the processional statue resembles a god house (*dyo chem*), as in certain places in Kathmandu. Processional statues (mostly of metal) are kept in these god houses, while temples are usually built outside the town with corresponding stone images. People can choose either place for worship (Van den Hoek & Shrestha 1992a:66). This is not the case with Vajrayoginī, because the temple with the fixed statue of Vajrayoginī and the temple where the processional statues are kept are in the same sanctuary, and the people who come to worship Vajrayoginī visit both temples. The fixed image of Vajrayoginī,<sup>12</sup> which is inside the pagoda temple, is called the Red-faced mother (Hyāumkhvāḥ māju) and her metal processional statue is called the Yellow-faced mother (Mhāsukhvāḥ māju). The two are also different iconographically: the red-faced one is peaceful in appearance, while the yellow-faced one is larger and fearsome in her appearance. As one priest told me, if one sees Mhāsukhvāḥ māju in one's dreams, this means one may face a small or a big quarrel the following day, while to see Hyāumkhvāḥ māju in one's dreams brings good luck and wealth.

The temple of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju faces north. Unlike the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī, entry is open for everybody except for the three untouchable castes from the Parvate community, Kāmī, Sārki and Gāine, and for the Dyolā, an untouchable Newar caste, which is traditionally allowed only to the Mahākāla shrine, which is situated about 200 metres below the temple complex.

On the first floor of the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, on the right of the main entrance, a fire pit (*migāḥ*) is situated, in which an eternal fire is kept to burn all the time. It is believed that the fire burning at all times makes it impossible for any evil spirits to enter the temple. People rub ash from the fire on their forehead as a mark of blessing. They believe that witches can do no harm to those who rub ash from this fire pit on their foreheads. The people who visit the temple also worship the fire. Some people also ask the priests to perform a fire sacrifice on their behalf.

Only grains and ghee are used for the fire sacrifice. The priest on duty must perform worship twice a day at the fire. A fire that is burnt on the fifth day of the festival of Vajrayoginī in the town after the completion of the main procession in the town also carries similar connotation.

From the historical records found in the colophons of mss MMC and SSS, the rule seems to have been that the Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu turned to the Kathmandu court in case of minor or major calamities. An exchange of sacred fire, for example, used to occur between the Pharping Vajrayoginī shrine and the Sankhu one, as well as, it was told, between the eternal fire at Paśupati, or the (long disappeared) eternal fire which used to be kept burning in the old palace of Hanumāṇdhokā in Kathmandu. During the month-long festival of Mādhavanārāyaṇ in Sankhu, a fire is kept burning at the Dhalāmpu rest house, where male participants stay by the statue of Mādhavanārāyaṇ during the night. A fire borrowed from the eternal fire of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple a day before the festival kindles this fire. If the fire at Dhalāmpu should go out before the festival ends, it must be lit from the fire of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple fire pit.

The fire at the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple, however, is not comparable to the Vedic fire temple of Agnimaṭha in Patan, where a Hindu Brahmin couple has to perform a daily fire sacrifice for their whole lives, and other occasional sacrifices are performed on the full-moon and new moon days. The Agnimaṭha of Patan has to be renewed in the case of the death of one of the *yajamāna* couple (Van den Hoek 1992), while at the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju it is essential only to keep the fire burning. The eternal fire of Vajrayoginī has no connection with Patan Agnimaṭha, whereas some people link it with the eternal fire in Paśupati.<sup>13</sup>



Plate 37 The sacred eternal fire at the temple of Mhāsukhvā māju (April 1997).



Plate 38 Processional statue of Buddha caitya at its temple; next to it is the legendary upside-down frying pan (April 1997).

To the left on the first floor of the Mhāsukhvā māju temple is a small room where the processional statue of the Buddhist stupa (Cibhā dyo) is kept. It is made of wood and covered with gilded copper. Eight images of the Buddha about 20 centimetres in size are attached to four sides of the stupa on the two terraces. The levels of the Cibhā dyo are detachable into several pieces.



Plate 39 A bronze head of the Buddha at the temple of Mhāsukhvā māju. However, legends recognise it as the head of the king Vikramāditya (April 1997).

The local people also consider the Cibhā dyo as the husband of Mhāsukhvā māju and the father of Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī (Lion and Tiger-faced goddesses). To the right of this Cibhā dyo, there is a colossal bronze head of the Buddha.<sup>14</sup>

The oral story about the head is that it was the head of the king Vikramāditya, who was unintentionally killed by his son. The Gopālarājavaṃśāvalī mentions the unintentional killing of a Licchavī king Viśvadev (Vṛṣadeva) by his son Mānadeva, who after this heinous crime observed penances at Guṃvihāra (Vajrācārya & Malla 1985:123). On the left of the Cibhā dyo, a huge iron cooking-pan is kept upside down. In the

golden age, a king named Dharmāgata of Viśālanagar used to fry himself daily to feed the goddess Vajrayoginī, and was revived each time after the act. When one of his servants called Vikram saw the king's secret deed, he went one day to perform the task earlier than the king. This time the goddess found the food particularly delicious. It made her very happy and she awarded Vikram with great wealth. Later on, when the king Dharmāgata came, the goddess gave him orders that from that day onwards, she did not need a sacrifice, and ordered him to turn the pan upside-down (Paudyal 1963:61-2 and Yogi 1956:21-23). At present this pan has no function, but visitors worship it by offering flowers, *ṭikā* and rice grains, as they do to other deities. A grinding stone to prepare sandalwood paste (*candan*) is also kept in a corner of this room. Devotees put *candan* as a mark of blessing on their foreheads.

In the northwestern corner of the first floor is a staircase leading down to the ground floor of the temple. The ground is used as a bedroom and kitchen for the priests, and meals for the deities are also cooked there. In the southwestern corner of the first floor, a staircase leads up to the second floor of the temple. The northern half of the second floor is separated from the southern half by a wall. There are two closed rooms on the northern half where people occasionally observe secret worship (*thā pūjā* or *gupti pūjā*) to Mhāsukhvāḥ māju and feast. The southern half of the first floor is open to the visitors. In this part there is a room of about four-square metres with a half-open iron fence where stand the processional statues of Vajrayoginī, the Yellow-faced mother (*Mhāsukhvāḥ māju*), and the Lion-faced (*Simhinī*) and Tiger-faced (*Byāghrinī*) guardians. The goddess Mhāsukhvāḥ māju is also called the wife of the Cihhā dyo and mother of Simhinī and Byāghrinī. Mhāsukhvā māju, Simhinī and Byāghrinī are all facing west; they are standing against the eastern wall of the temple. On the left and the right of these three statues are the statues of Vasundharā, who is considered the mother-in-law of Vajrayoginī.<sup>15</sup> The one on the right, which used to receive ceremonial worship at the time of the Gātīlā fast (*dhalam danegu*) in September (Yamlāgā Ṭṛtiyā), was stolen in August 1997. It was about 20 cm high, while the Vasundharā statue on the left is about 70 cm. All these statues are decorated with various gold and silver ornaments and their bodies are covered with shiny cloth (*tās*).<sup>16</sup>

In front of the statue of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju is placed a rectangular shaped silver bowl of about a metre in size where people offer wicks (*itā*) and incense. In the middle of this square is a plate called *bhinābhu* where people offer food to the deities. These deities do not accept any food containing meat, fish or eggs directly in their mouths, so people offer this kind of food by placing it on the silver bowl in the name of these deities.



People can offer vegetarian food such as flatten rice, sweets and fruits, flowers, *tikā*, or money directly to the deities.

The main processional statue of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju or the yellow-faced mother is about two metres tall. Her body is always covered with shiny cloth (*tās*). A Vajrācārya priest informed me that her inner body is made of wood and covered with gilded copper. Her wooden body is in the shape of a holy jar (*kalaśa*). Her feet are always covered with a brass plate designed as her lower garment, which is also covered with the shiny cloth. Her face is yellow in colour as it is coated with gold and has three eyes. To carry her out during her festival at least six people are necessary. She has two hands; in her left hand is a flower made of gold.<sup>17</sup> And a loose sword is attached to her right hand but behind her fingers. A priest told me that she has to carry a sword as a result of an agreement with Śaṅkarācārya, but she is primarily a goddess of non-violence (*ahiṃsā*), and originally she carried a thunderbolt (*vajra*) in her hand. A legend goes that the Hindu saint Śaṅkarācārya came to Nepal to promote Hindu religion by eliminating Buddhists and Buddhism.

The goddess Vajrayoginī, however, stopped him from going beyond the temple sanctuary of Vajrayoginī after he was defeated in a religious debate (*śāstrārtha*) with her. As Śaṅkarācārya lost the debate he had to agree to exchange his sword with the thunderbolt of Vajrayoginī. Since then Vajrayoginī has a sword in her hand. By accepting the sword she also agreed to allow blood sacrifices at the Mahākāla shrine in her name, but not any direct sacrifices to her. It is believed that from then onwards the sacred Buddhist shrine of Vajrayoginī also turned into a Hindu pilgrimage site, while Śaṅkarācārya also had to accept the Buddhist religious idea of non-violence (*ahiṃsaka*).<sup>18</sup> By carrying the sword not exactly in her hand but behind her fingers, Vajrayoginī indicates her basic non-violent nature. The processional statues of the Lion-faced and the Tiger-faced deities are each about 1.3 metres in height. Their bodies are covered with shiny clothes and silver ornaments. These statues are made of clay. At least two strong men are necessary to carry them out and in again.

In the corner to the left of these statues two other statues are kept. Sharma gave iconographic details of these statues. He identified both as Gautama, the Buddha, while Locke identified one as Buddha and another as Padmapānī Lokeśvara (Sharma 1970:1-5 and Locke 1979/80). Sharma dated one Buddha as not earlier than the eleventh century and another Buddha as 14th century. Locke dated the Buddha as eleventh century and the Padmapānī as twelfth/thirteenth century. These two are fixed statues. According to Sharma, the 52 inches tall bronze idol of Buddha is the tallest one in Nepal. People in Sankhu do not consider this statue as the

Buddha, but believe that this statue was made in memory of the queen who came from the blacksmith (*kau*) caste. So it began to be called “The Blacksmith Queen” (*kau mahārānī*). The other statue is 32 inches tall. Visitors worship all the statues in the room of the Yellow-faced mother. The two Buddhas are not carried out in any procession.



Plate 40 The processional statues of Vajrayoginī at her temple: centre: yellow-faced mother (Mhāsukhvā māju), right: Lion-faced guardian (Siṃhinī) and left: Tiger-faced guardian (Byāghrinī). On the right and left of them are Vasundharā (April 1997).

The courtyard of this temple is surrounded by two-storeyed rest houses (*sataḥ*), which are used by the people of Sankhu and outsiders on different occasions for feasting. A flower garden is maintained behind the rest houses. Occasionally outsiders stay overnight in those rest houses. A family occupies one of these rest houses. At the centre of these buildings, in the courtyard, there is a traditional stone spout. About fifty steps north of the courtyard is an open temple of Gaṇeśa, locally known by the name ‘Gum Gaṇeśa’, the Gaṇeśa of the forest. It is a small temple with a stone image of Gaṇeśa facing south. Whoever comes to the Vajrayoginī temple

must also visit this Gaṇeśa. People believe that the Guṃ Gaṇeśa is the most powerful one among the other Gaṇeśas around Sankhu, and blesses his devotees with prosperity and helps them to find things they have lost. The area around the Gaṇeśa shrine is used as a picnic spot.



Plate 41 The Statue of a Buddha but believed to be the blacksmith queen and Lokeśvar (April 1997).

### **The pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī (Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju)**

About fifty steps down to the south of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple is the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī or Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju or the Red-faced mother. Her statue is a fixed one. The temple is a three-storeyed pagoda style building. An inscription at the Vajrayoginī Sanctuary says that king Pratap Malla (1641-1647) had it built in the year 1655 (NS 775). Later, queen mother Bhuvanlakṣmī, king Bhaskar Malla's (1701-1715) mother,

constructed it in pagoda style in the year AD 1712. Before that, it was in the Gaṇṭhakūṭa style.<sup>19</sup> This temple withstood the earthquake of 1934. The top roof of the temple is made of gilded copper, the second roof is partially gilded (on the southern side), and the third roof is all copper. The wooden struts supporting the roofs are carved with different images of Buddhist deities. The door faces south.

The total height of the temple after a detailed measurement was found to be 17.40 metres from the bottom to the top of the pinnacle. The ground floor of the temple covers an area of ten square metres.<sup>20</sup> The topmost roof of the temple is supported by eight struts, the middle one by sixteen struts, the lowest roof is supported by twenty-four struts and the four corners of each roof are supported by two pairs of griffins and *śārdulas* (fabulous creatures). All the struts, griffins and *śārdulas* are made of wood and are beautifully carved. A gilded copper *patāḥ*, believed to be a divine serpent *nāga*, hangs from the pinnacle down to the lowest roof of the temple. The structures of the temples of Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju and Jogeśvara are both standing on a single rock. The restoration of the main temple of the Vajrayoginī or the Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju takes place when the necessity is felt.

There are several notes to be found in SSS and MMC regarding the restorations of the Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju temple and rituals performed on such occasions. In 1999, the latest restoration of this temple took place under the auspices of the Friends of Sankhu, with the major financial assistance from the NEDA, the Dutch government and the VNN.

The goddess Vajrayoginī, who is known locally by the name Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju (Red-faced mother), is also known by the name Khaḍgayoginī (the Yoginī with a sword) and Ugratārā (the fearsome goddess). She has one face with three eyes and two arms. Her right hand holds a sword (*khaḍga*) and her left hand holds a flower.

Her two attendants, lion-faced (Simhinī) and tiger-faced (Byāghrinī), are placed on her right and left. These deities are dressed in red shiny cloth (*tās*) and decorated with gold and silver ornaments. On the right of Simghinī Heruka is placed, and on the left of Byāghrinī Acala, but a Vajrācārya priest said that they are Rupinīs.<sup>21</sup> They are all facing south. I assume that they are made of wood. The Vajrācārya priests are not willing to disclose the nature of the materials because they think if they disclose the nature of the materials of the body of the goddess, they will be punished for breaking a secret.

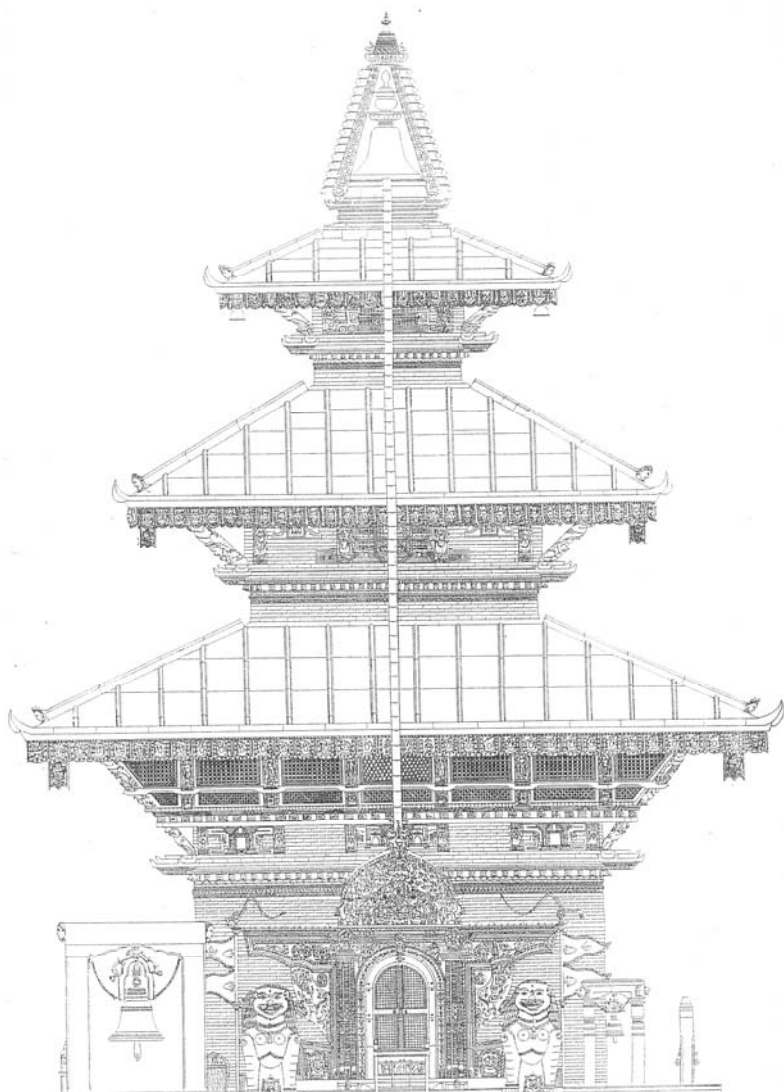


Plate 42 Front view of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī drawn by Gyanendra Joshi (1996).

Once every twelve years, traditional Newar painters (Citrakār) from the Maru quarter of Kathmandu who have had the proper initiation (*dikṣā*) repaint these statues. In 1998, the twelve-yearly repainting (*lampuṃ chāyegu*) of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju took place. Premman Citrakār, a traditional Newar painter, who is also a famous contemporary Thankā painter of Nepal, did the repainting. In an interview, he revealed that he removed fifty layers of old paint from the body of the goddess, but he refused to speak about the material from which her body is made. He said that because of the initiation (*dikṣā*) he had to undergo before the painting, he was obliged to keep it a secret.

The Red-faced Mother is about 1.30 metre in height; Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī are about one metre high and the Rupinīs about 30 cm. Except for the male Buddhist priests (Vajrācārya) who take turns, no others are allowed to go inside the temple.<sup>22</sup> Visitors are allowed to come up to the temple gate, from where they can see the goddess and pay their respects and hand over offerings to the priests. In return, the visitors receive flowers, holy water (*jala*), red and yellow powder mixed with water (*sinhaṃ*, Nep.: *ṭikā*) and soot marks (*mohanī*) as blessings (*prasād*) from the goddess. The processional statue of Vasundharā, which is carried out during the Pañjārāṃ festival is kept on the left of the goddess Vajrayoginī. This Vasundharā is brought out once a year during the Pañjārāṃ festival in September. The temple is also used to store ornaments and valuables belonged to Vajrayoginī.

Above the temple gate is a gilded tympanum (*torāṇa*). The central figure of the *torāṇa* is a female image with one face and eight arms standing in a dancing posture and treading on two prostrate figures. She does not match the image inside the temple, but is considered to be the goddess Vajrayoginī. She has a garland of skulls and she is fully clothed. Her right hands hold a sword, the *tarjani mudrā*, *vajra* and chopper. Her left hands hold a lotus bud on a stem, a bow, an elephant goad and a skull bowl.

She is flanked directly by identical four-armed goddesses and on the outer sides by two two-armed goddesses standing on a *preta* each with the head of a sow holding a *kartri* and *kapāla*.<sup>23</sup> Above these figures seven images of the Buddha are placed in their various postures. Below the both ends of the tympanum or on the top of the beams of the temple gate, three-faced goddesses with eight hands are placed. Although they have three faces, their appearances are similar to the central figure of the tympanum. Below the central figure of the tympanum on the top of the door is another identical image with four hands. Behind her a seven-headed divine serpent is placed (*nāgakusā*). All these figures are considered to be duplicates of

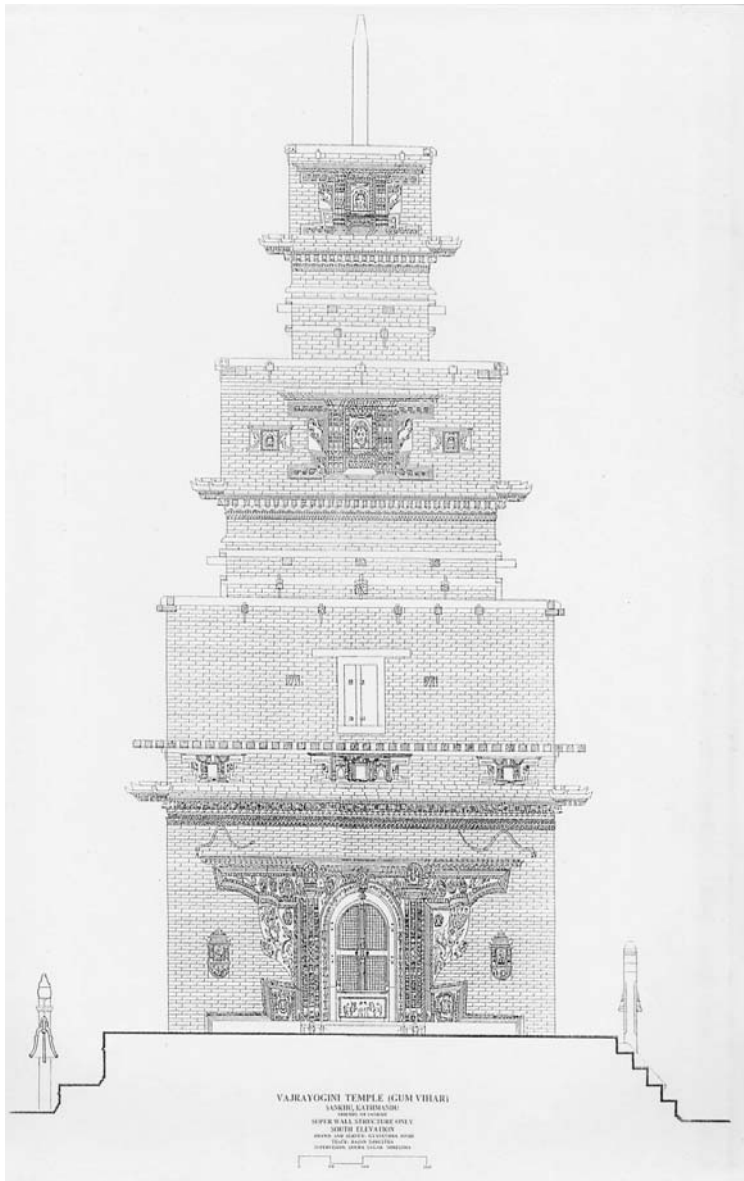


Plate 43 Wall structure of the temple (1996).



Plate 44 Eastern face of the temple (1996).





Plate 45 Front view of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī (April 1997).

the goddess Vajrayoginī in the temple, but their appearances vary iconographically (see picture of the tympanum). Two pairs of lions guard the entrance of the temple; one pair is made of brass and the other is of stone.

In the Kathmandu Valley there are four important Yoginīs: Vajrayoginī at Pharping, Khadgayoginī at Pulchok, Ākāśayoginī at Bijeshvarī and Vajrayoginī at Sankhu.<sup>24</sup> Referring to the *Purāṇas*, Dhooswan Saymi says that Yoginī is one of the most important manifestations of the mother goddess; there are as many Yoginīs as there are clans (*gotras*). He adds that, according to Nepalese tradition, there are sixty-four Yoginīs and that Vajrayoginī is the most revered one.<sup>25</sup> Similarly, N.N. Bhattacharyya says, “Yoginī denotes female Tantric aspirants, a class of goddesses and also different aspects of the Female Principle residing within the human body. The earlier Yoginīs were women of flesh and blood, priestesses supposed to be possessed by the goddess. Later they were raised to the status of divinity. Each of the eight Mātṛkās is again said to have manifested herself in eight forms, thus, making a total of sixty-four Yoginīs. Temples dedicated to the sixty-four Yoginīs are scattered all over Central India” (1982:386).

According to the Buddhist tradition, Vajrayoginī is a Tārā,<sup>26</sup> a consort of the Buddha. In the Mahāyānī tradition she is called Tārā, and in the Vajrayānī tradition she is called Yoginī. About Vajrayoginī, Bhattacharyya (1992: 240-1) says that she is identical in appearance to the Śākta goddess Chinnamastā. She is generally represented as accompanied by two Yoginīs, one on either side of her. In a song Vajrayoginī is called the jewel head of Nepal (Nepalyā Śiromaṇi). According to a Hindu myth, as a result of the Hindu gods Brahmā, Viṣṇu and Mahādeva’s penance, Vajrayoginī of Sankhu came into existence. Nemunī, who is believed to be the founder of Nepal, also did penance to Vajrayoginī and was blessed by her (Paudyal 1963:30). According to B. Bhattacharyya (1968) the Vajrayoginī temple at Sankhu does not contain an image of any of the varieties of Vajrayoginī, but contains the image of Ugratārā, more popularly known as Mahācina Tārā. His conclusion is based on his listening of a recitation of a hymn (*dhyān*) by the priests during his visit to the Vajrayoginī sanctuary in a certain year.<sup>27</sup>

Furthermore he wrote that the image was believed to have been carried there by Bengali priests from the district of Dacca, in about AD 1350, when the Mohammedans led victorious armies over Eastern Bengal (Bhattacharyya 1992: 157). In his book he gives two drawings of Mahācina Tārā (plate XXVII), both of which have four arms and stand on

a human body, which is not the case with the Vajrayoginī in Sankhu (Liebert 1976:157).



Plate 46 The gilded tympanum (torana) on the top of the entrance of pagoda temple Vajrayoginī (April 1997).

In my reading, the image of Vajrayoginī at the Hyāumkhvāḥ māju temple cannot be identified with Mahācina Tārā, because she has only two arms, and is not seen as standing on a human body. N. Bhattacharyya says that Vajrayoginī is identical in appearance with the Śākta goddess Chinnamastā, who is generally represented as accompanied by two yoginīs, one on either side of her.<sup>28</sup>

People in Sankhu believe that the processional statues of Vajrayoginī Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī are the replicas of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī. They also consider Vajrayoginī to be a form of the Hindu goddess Kālī or Durgā.

### **The enshrined *cibhā* or the pagoda temple of Jogeśvara**

Another important temple in the sanctuary is the *cibhā* (*stupa*) of the Buddha (Dharma Dhātu Mahācaitya), which is also locally known as the Jogeśvara *Caitya* and Cībāhā dyo. This deity is also called *Caitya bharāda*. The SSS (folio 23a) mentions this temple as a *Caitya bahāla*

(monastery) and Svayambhū *Caitya* Bhaṭṭāraka. As we explained earlier, this is the oldest known Buddhist shrine in the Nepal Valley. It stands about three metres east of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju. It is a two-storeyed temple full of wood carvings: it has four gates, three of which have a wooden tympanum while the main one facing the west has a gilded tympanum. All tympanums are covered with images of Buddhist deities. In this temple too, only the Vajrācārya priest may enter. The *Cibhā* inside the temple is about three metres high. It is said that the original *Cibhā* was made of stone and was later covered with silver plate.

Some people in Sankhu also claim that the stone below the *Cibhā* was originally a Śiva liṅga and was later covered by the *Cibhā*, but the Vajrācārya priests deny such claims.

A Buddhist *Cibhā* found inside a pagoda style temple is unique in Nepal (Slusser 1982:150). As a note in the SSS (folio 23a) mentions, king Bhupalendra Malla installed the interior of the Ganṭhakuṭa temple in 1698 (809 NS). The MMC and MMC-I also confirms this note, and both state that as the old temple was in a dilapidated condition a cow ritually pulled down its pinnacle on the first day of Māgha Kṛṣṇa in 1609 (809 NS), before the pulling down of the temple to build the Ganṭhakuṭa temple. After the completion of the reconstruction, king Bhupalendra Malla himself attended the fire sacrifice and offered its pinnacle on the twelfth day of Āsāḍha Śukla in the same year (MMC-I folio 14b). It seems that restoration of this temple took place time and again. Another note in the SSS (folio 46a) says that to construct the two-storeyed pagoda temple a *pādasthāpanā* was made on Phālguṇ Śudi 3, 1727 (NS 847), but there is no further information about its completion, nor does it specify whether the old structure was pulled down to be replaced by a pagoda shape. Friends of Sankhu initiated the replacement of zinc roofs with copper sheets in 2000-1. They were able to reuse the old copper sheets, which they removed from the temple of Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju when they renovated it. They also received financial support from the District Development Committee of Kathmandu for this purpose.

According to Locke (1985), this is the shrine of the *kvāpā dyo*, and the deity is either identified as Svayambhū (the self-existent Buddha) or Amitābha. The historian Dhanavajra has written that before the place became famous by the name of the goddess Vajrayoginī, it derived its fame from the Buddhist monastery “Guṃvihāra” (Vajrācārya 1972:25 and Slusser 1982:166). People in Sankhu consider Jogeśvara Buddha as the husband of the goddess Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju (Vajrayoginī) and father of Simhinī and Byāghrinī. They believe that the processional statue of *Cibhā* placed in the Mhāsukhvā māju temple is a replica of it. All the Vajrācārya

priests in Sankhu as well as many other Vajrācāryas and Śākyas from Kathmandu also consider this *Cibhā* as their lineage deity (*digu dyo*). For this reason Gellner writes that this is very suggestive of a historical and ritual link going back to the Licchavi period, when one of the largest monasteries of the Valley was on the site of Vajrayoginī (Gellner 1996:240 and n10).



Plate 47 The enshrined Buddha Caitya of Jogeśvar Cībhā (November 1997).

### Other *cibhās* around the temple of Jogeśvara

Next to the Jogeśvara temple to its south are three stone *cibhā*, and to its southwest is another *cibhā*. North of the temple there are three more *cibhās*. They are all about two metres in height. According to an archaeologist's analysis of the *stupa* around the sanctuary, four of them are in monolithic style from the Licchavi period.<sup>29</sup> Individual devotees had built them in memory of their ancestors.

To the west of the Jogeśvara temple, southeast from the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī, there is a big stone of Bāsuki *nāga*, a divine serpent, which is considered a Buddha but without any shape. As a divine serpent, it is believed he is the most powerful *nāga* around Sankhu who can bring rain. During the rice-transplantation season, if the monsoon does not arrive on time, people in Sankhu come there *en masse* and pray for rain by pouring water on his body. They believe that after such an act he will grant rain immediately.

### The temple of Mañjuśrī or Nemuni

To the west of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī there is a small temple of the goddess Saraśvatī and the saint Nemuni (a form of Mañjuśrī, the god of knowledge). The human size stone statue of Nemuni was stolen in 1985.<sup>30</sup> According to a Hindu myth, the saint Nemuni was a devotee of Vajrayoginī, and he was blessed by the goddess Vajrayoginī to establish the country of Nepal (Paudyal 1963) whereas the god Mañjuśrī is acknowledged for cleaving the Cobhār gorge with his sword to drain the water from the primordial lake of the Nepal Valley to make it suitable for human dwelling. It is also said that it was Vajrayoginī who inspired Mañjuśrī to drain the water from the Valley.<sup>31</sup> Identifying a single statue as both Mañjuśrī and Nemunī is meaningful, because both are considered to be the creators of Nepal by the Nepalese people.

### Stone spouts (*lvahaṃ hītī*)

Three waterspouts are situated in the northwest corner of the Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju temple. The priests collect water from these spouts for the daily bath of gods and goddesses. Devotees also make use of these spouts to take a bath and to offer water to the deities. In front of these waterspouts there are two stone *cibhās*. As we know from our discussion of the inscriptions found in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, several of them including the oldest inscription dated 1168 (NS 288) are from this site. Another stone spout

situated in front of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple is also for these purposes, but does not bear any inscription. Similarly the Jogadhārā spout situated at the Mahākāla and another stone spout situated at the bottom of 108 stone steps do not bear any inscription.

### **Rest places (*sataḥ/phalcā*)**

Besides the four rest places in the courtyard of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple, there are two rest places (*phalcā*) in the temple complex: one is straight in front of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī to the south, and another is to the west of the temple. The devotees use both these rest places for singing devotional songs (*bhajan*) as well as for meditation and recitation of texts such as the Prajñāpāramitā or the *caṇḍī śtrotra* hymns dedicated to the goddess Durgā. The one situated to the west of the temple has two floors; its ground floor is used for singing devotional songs, while police guards has been using the first floor since the 1960s. Before this members of an association called Sakhāykhalaḥ *guthi* used to guard it, taking turns until the police took over the task.

### **Monastery and rock caves**

About twenty metres northeast of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī there is a small one-storeyed monastery, which is occupied by a monk, a follower of the Tibetan form of Mahāyāna Buddhism. He is from the Newar Jyāpu caste. It is now quite rare to find a Newar following the Tibetan Mahāyāna tradition. This building faces south. In front of this building are two Buddhist *Caityas* made of stones, each of which is about one and a half metres tall. People who visit Vajrayoginī sanctuary also circumambulate these *Caityas*, but the local people often ignore the monastery.

As is described in the MM, there are nine cave monasteries (*pāko*) around the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. Among them, four caves are to the west within a distance of a hundred metres of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī, while the other five are situated some distance away but can be reached within an hour or two on foot. Sometimes Tibetan monks who had fled from Tibet also take shelter in these caves situated close to Vajrayoginī temple. The nine caves around the Vajrayoginī sanctuary are considered to be important monasteries. People visit them on the day of *sāpāru*, the first day of the dark half of Śrāvan (August) to gain religious merit. People also call it the day to learn about the nine caves (*sikegu*). In a ritual text that I

obtained from a priest, the merits of visiting these caves are noted and the materials to be offered at these caves during the worship are also listed.<sup>32</sup>



Plate 48 The cave monastery with the hole of merits (*dharma pvācā*) on the left and the main entrance on the right, at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary (November 2010).

One of the caves situated about sixty metres west of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī is known locally as *Dharma pvācā*, or the ‘hole of religion.’ It is made of a single rock and has a single entrance. Its interior is divided into two parts, the southern part being empty while the northern part contains a few images of Buddhist deities. In the northern part of the cave a small manhole has been made on the eastern wall, and the local people use this hole leaving the cave. People believe a person of any size can let himself out of the hole if he is religious, but if the person is sinful he or she may get stuck. For this reason the cave is known as the hole of religion (*dharma pvācā*). People remember that once a man got stuck in the hole and the hole had to be broken to let him out.



### Bells (*gaṃ*)

There are a couple of bells in the temple compound and among them two are very big; they produce distinct notes. The ringing of these two bells can easily be heard from Sankhu town. Devotees are allowed to ring these two bells only in the morning. Everyday, in the afternoon, at about three, after performing a day time *pūjā*, the Vajrācārya priests and their assistants ring the bells, and this also indicates to the people of Sankhu that it is time to take their day time food (*baji*). Then finally in the evening, at the time of evening *pūjā*, again they ring the bells. After that, it is forbidden to ring the bells till the next morning. However, in case of an emergency (fire, theft or calamities) and during the festival of Vajrayoginī, the bells may be rung at any time. If the emergency bell is rung, at least one male member from each household of Sankhu must go to the temple site for help. In 1969, some armed thieves plundered the temple and managed to escape from the temple site. As soon as they walked away from the temple complex towards the town, the priests and the night guards (members of the Sakhāykhalaḥ *guthi*) rang the emergency bell. When the people of Sankhu heard the ringing of the bells in the middle of the night, they immediately ran towards the temple and caught all the thieves.

### Upside-down Śiva or Śaṅkarācārya

Just outside the main entrance of the Vajrayoginī temple complex on the right side of the 108 stone steps is a big rock carved as an image of the god Śiva's phallus (*liṅga*) facing upside-down.

A legend goes in Sankhu that when once the god Śiva visited Vajrayoginī, he behaved stupidly so the goddess Vajrayoginī kicked him down and he fell from the hill upside-down. Later, he took a vow and turned himself into a learned man. Till today his image is kept upside-down there to remind people how one can suffer if one is illiterate. Some people in Sankhu also call it a figure of Śaṅkarācārya. They believe that when Śaṅkarācārya tried to invade the temple of Vajrayoginī during his mission to spread Hinduism, the goddess Vajrayoginī kicked him down from the hill.

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tried to invade the temple of Vajrayoginī during his mission to spread Hinduism, the goddess Vajrayoginī kicked him down from the hill.



Plate 49 Image of Śiva facing upside-down situated to the right of the 108 stone steps leading to the temple gate of Vajrayoginī. Many also worship it as an image of the Buddha (November 1997).

### One hundred and eight stone steps

The main entrance of the Vajrayoginī complex is situated just after the 108 stone steps. Religious Nepalese people believe that 108 is an auspicious number, so they think it is virtuous to climb 108 steps to reach the temple complex. A few steps before the bottom of the 108 steps there is an open courtyard where the palanquins of the processional statues are kept. This place is called *sālhāy*. At the bottom of the 108 stone steps is a *cibhā* in the middle of the road. People keep it to their right when they walk around it. A stone spout is situated on the northwest corner of the *cibhā*. About a

hundred metres below the *cibhā* to the south is the shrine of Mahākāla Bhairava.

### **The Mahākāla shrine**

The shrine of Mahākāla Bhairava is a triangular-shaped stone about two metres high, where animals are sacrificed during different occasions. The shrine of Mahākāla is considered to be one of the *aṣṭamātrkā* around Sankhu as it also considered to be Mahālakṣmī, one of the *mātrkā*s. Behind the Mahākāla shrine to the north is a stone spout Jogdhārā, facing east. People use it to take a holy bath and to offer water to the Mahākāla shrine. To the west of the Mahākāla shrine is a stone image of a Gaṇeśa about one metre high, facing east. In front of the Mahākāla shrine, to the south is a rest place where occasional singing of devotional songs (*bhajan*) takes place. To the northeast of the shrine a new rest place was built in the last decade. At the site of Mahākāla, people had to take off their leather shoes to climb the steps to the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, but nowadays people do not follow this rule strictly.

### **Other important religious sites on the way to Sankhu**

On the way back to the town from the temple there are many spots that are important for religious purposes. About fifty steps down from the Mahākāla shrine is a *cibhā*. This *cibhā* was installed only in the 1960s in memory of a person who died at that spot when he was walking toward the Vajrayoginī temple. A few metres below the *cibhā* to the right of the stone steps is a stream where people take a bath. About thirty metres below this stream there are a rest place and three stone spouts (*svapu hiti*). Sixty steps below the three stone taps are a recently made white *cibhā* (*tuyucibhā*). From this point, one way leads to town and another leads to a Tibetan monastery that was built in the 1970s. Since the monastery is located some distance off the main road, the local people rarely visit it. About fifty metres below the White *cibhā* is a rest place (*phalcā*) which was built in the 1980s. On the right side of the rest place is a rock that is called Lhāsāphākāhā, or the ‘steep hill of Lhāsā.’ Children believe that one who can climb the stone easily can reach Lhāsā, the capital of Tibet, while one who fails will never be able to reach Lhāsā. About a hundred metres below the rest place are two stone images on the left side of the road that are believed to be the shrines of Ajāju and Ajimā (grandfather and grandmother). People also call them the father and mother of Vajrayoginī and pay respect to them. Twenty steps south of these images is a small pit

in the middle of the road called the heart of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju. People avoid stepping on it and walk round it to pay respect to the goddess Vajrayoginī. About seventy metres south of the pit is a rest house called Simhapusataḥ. A *yogi* Giri family of the Parvate community resides in this rest house. A stone spout below the rest house is also known by the name of the Simhapusataḥ spout (*hiti*). About thirty steps below the Simhapusataḥ is a god called Ghāysi dyo or the god of grass. In between the Simhapusataḥ and Ghāysi dyo, in the middle of the stone steps there is an enigmatic stone. People avoid stepping over this stone as they respect it as a god. They believe that someone who steps over this stone will meet a person with spots of smallpox on his face who will be his or her marriage partner. People worship the Ghāysi dyo in order to become able to learn things without difficulty. Some people believe that this god only teaches one to learn the art of cutting grass, so those who dislike cutting grass do not pay any respect to this god. A few metres south of this shrine is a pond called *Durupukhu*, or the pond of milk where a shrine of Śiva is placed. And about two hundred steps below the pond is Devācā, where a stone *cibhā* stands in the middle of the road.

### Devācā

During the procession of Vajrayoginī, when the processional statues arrive at Devācā, the Vajrācārya priests open the eyes of the deities (*dr̥ṣṭi kamkegu*). In the northeast corner of this *cibhā* is a rest place. Once a year the Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu observe their *digu pūjā* and the ceremony of eating *nepājā* at this place. There is also a Buddhist *stupa* here. About a hundred metres deep below the Devācā is the Kolāgākhusi, a small rivulet.

### Kolāgā, the boundary between town and forest

Kolāgā is believed to boarder line between Sankhu town and the forest of Guṃbāhāḥ. During the festival of Vajrayoginī, on the way back to the temple when the palanquins cross a small channel close to the rivulet of Kolāgā, the carriers are not allowed to carry them back towards the town. In the past, the people of Sankhu had to retreat from this point to let the Tāmāng people, as the dwellers of the Guṃbāhāḥ forest (Ghumārichok), carry the palanquins back to the temple, but nowadays Newar people also join them in carrying the palanquins to the temple.

### **Lisvamatabigu dyo**

Towards the south, about a hundred steps above the Kolāgāl boundary, there is a rest place, Kolāgā phalcā. This area is also the burial ground for the Jogi caste. On the southwest corner of this rest place there is a stone image called Lisvamatabigu dyo where visitors to the temple pay their respect by saying their last goodbye to the deities of the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. Lisvamata bīgu means to offer light while looking behind, that is, to say goodbye to Vajrayoginī. In particular on the day of *bicāḥ pūjā*, three days after the end of Vajrayoginī procession, when people visit the temple for the *bicāḥ pūjā* worship, they have to perform an act of worship to Lisvamatabigu dyo on their way back home.

### **Bhamcā svayegu dyo**

Further south, about 50 metres from the Kolāgā phalcā, there is the Bhamcā disā svayegu dyo, or the deity looking in the direction of one's marriage partner. Here unmarried girls or boys drop rice grains to find out the probable whereabouts of their future marriage partner. They believe that the rice grains, which they drop on this stone jump in the direction from where his or her marriage partner will come in the future. From this junction people can enter the town of Sankhu by taking either the Dhoṃlādhvākā gate or the Sālkhā Mahādevadhvākā gate.

### **Final respects to the goddess Vajrayoginī**

One who takes the Dhoṃlādhvākā gate pays his final respects to Vajrayoginī at the Dhoṃlādhvākā gate. If one takes the Sālkhā Mahādevadhvākā gate one pays one's final respects to Vajrayoginī at the northern rim of the Mahādeva temple complex, where a stone image with three *mandala*, believed to be the representative of the goddess Vajrayoginī is situated. People who cannot climb the hill or do not find time to go to the temple of Vajrayoginī may also come to pay their respects to Vajrayoginī at this place. There are several similar round stones (*mandalā*) on the way to the Vajrayoginī temple. When people encounter such a stone they go round it to pay their respects to the goddess Vajrayoginī.

### **Worship of the deities at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary**

For the people of Sankhu the goddess Vajrayoginī is the most honoured goddess whom they consider as their divine mother and patron. For them,

to please her is the most important task, because she is the most powerful deity who bestows health, wealth, family and children on them. Devotees from Sankhu visit the temple almost every day, while people from faraway places visit her as often as possible. People generally visit the temple before noon, as they consider this to be the best time. People who visit the temple do not partake of any food or drink before they have finished their worship. People believe that Saturdays and Tuesdays are the best days to visit the temple. On these days it is easy to please gods and goddesses. The most crowded times in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary is during festival days, the nine days (*nava rātri*) of the Dasain festival, the month-long Guṃlā festival (August/September). Every full-moon days, nine days of Dasain (*nava rātri*) Juhānavamī, Bālācarhe, Śrīpaṃcamī, Caitya Dasain, Nāgpaṃcamī, Gathāṃmugaḥcarhe, Gunhipunhi are also auspicious days that attract more people to the temple than any ordinary days. During the month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa most people who visit Śālinadī also visit Vajrayoginī, so it receives a large number of visitors during this month as well.

Each day two groups of people from Sankhu go to sing devotional songs at the sanctuary and a pair of Jogi musicians performs their music there. It was found from a survey carried out on a Saturday morning during the month-long Guṃlā festival (29 August 1998) that 356 devotees visited the temple. Among them 157 did not bring any material to offer the deities, while 128 persons brought rice grains and flowers, 63 brought plates with materials for performing worship, and three brought baskets with items for worship (*kalah pūjā*).<sup>33</sup> Five people recited hymns (*pātha*) for an hour or longer.<sup>34</sup> Occasionally people come to offer 108 lamps or a 125,000-wick light or to perform a fire sacrifice in front of the temple of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju temple. On the day of our survey two groups of people were present to offer 108 lights.

As we have mentioned, the legend of MM describes the ways for worshipping Vajrayoginī, and the merits one obtains from these. However, most people who visit the temple are not aware of the description given in the MM. For the people of Sankhu, to visit the temple of Vajrayoginī is an inherited tradition.

People believe that Vajrayoginī is one of the most powerful goddesses and can bestow on people any boon they wish if she is pleased, but if she is angry she can cause immense troubles. She is the mother of three worlds who can see the past, present and future and decide the fate of each person. She is the first in the world and creator of the world (*ādiśakti mahāmāyā*). She can do everything and see everything (*antaryāmī*). She is not only

capable of bestowing health and wealth on people, but can also harm, torture, and destroy if she finds someone to be sinful.

### **The Daily worship (*nitya pūjā*)**

Besides the visitors, the Vajrācārya priest whose turn it is at the temple has to take full responsibility for worshipping all the gods and goddesses at the temple sanctuary every day (*nitya pūjā*). As we learned from our earlier discussion, the Vajrācārya priests had a *guthi* with abundant income for the purpose of *nitya pūjā* in the past, but they lost this as the tillers of the land stopped paying them rents from the lands belonging to their *guthi*. Nowadays, the priest whose turn it is has to carry out *nitya pūjā* from the income he makes at the temple during his turn. The Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu take eight-day turns (*pāh*) to perform duties in the temple. Every Tuesday a new *pāhlā*, whose turn it is takes over the duties in the temple. There are five branches (*kavaḥ*) of Vajrācāryas in Sankhu, and in each branch there are several sub-branches, because of the divisions among their descendants. One can also delegate one's turn or arrange to sell it within the circle of these five branches. In case of crisis, one can remain in the temple for an unspecified time. For instance, in 1996 and 1997 there was a dispute over the counting of ornaments, so the priest Kanakmuni Vajrācārya who was on duty at that time had to continue his duties in the temple for more than a year until the dispute was settled. The *pāhlā* has to take care of the temples of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, Jogeśvara and Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, so stays in the temple with his family. He has to shave his head and cut his toenails, and eat boiled rice only once a day during those eight days. The priest must not sleep with his wife, and he cannot observe death rituals if any of his relatives die during the time of his duty. He has to perform daily worship (*nitya pūjā*) and feed the deities every day. Daily worship of the deities at the temple sanctuary is one of the most important acts of the priest.

The priest on duty at the temple must get up early in the morning to make himself ready before devotees begin visiting the temple. Usually, he gets up at about four or four-thirty in the morning and takes his bath at one of the stone spouts at the sanctuary. Devotees who visit the temple early in the morning may also take over the morning cleaning (*vasibam puigu*) at the Mhāsukhvā māju temple, and some may also grind sandalwood paste (*candan*) later to be served as a blessing to visitors by the priest from the Hyāumkhvāḥ māju temple. After the bath, the priest first goes to open the gate of the Jogeśvara temple and he sweeps around the *cibhā* as a gesture of morning cleaning. He carries the dust out and dumps it behind the rest

place situated south of the Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju temple. It is forbidden to step on the dust because the dust contains flowers and rice offered to *cibhā*. Then the priest opens the gate of the Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju temple and removes a red curtain painted with a Buddha from the gate and steps into the temple. Firstly he removes the red cloth from the images of Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju, Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī that he had covered the previous night. As my informant priest told me, it is necessary to cover the deities every evening in order to let them sleep at night. Another reason is also to give them security. He also unfastens the pieces of shiny cloth that cover the faces of deities and bind their hands. Then he brushes around the temple and hands over two plates for worship (*pūjābhu*) to one of the devotees to get them washed. When they are brought back to the temple he puts items for worship on both the plates. I will provide a short description of a daily act of worship at the sanctuary as I observed it.

### ***Worship of Jogeśvara Cibhā***

Carrying one of the plates for worship, the priest first goes to the Jogeśvara temple. In the temple, he first worships a bronze mirror (*jvalānhāykaṃ*,)<sup>35</sup> this is to clean and purify the mirror before showing it to the god *cibhā* and throws some rice and flowers over the *cibhā* statue. Then he picks up a small wooden stick and a wooden pestle (*siṃgaṃ*, literally wooden bell) from the northern corner of the temple and carries them outside. The priest stands in front of the temple gate facing the north and holds the pestle on his left shoulder and begins beating it with the small wooden stick. He beats the pestle 108 times. This ritual is called the ringing of the wooden bell (*siṃgaṃ thāyegu*). According to the priest, it is to invite all the deities to attend the worship. The priest said he needs to face the north because all the deities whom he worships are located facing south.

When the beating ends, he goes back to the temple and puts the pestle and stick back in the same corner. Then he carries out the worship of the *cibhā* and other images of Buddha in the temple by offering water, *ṭikā*, flower, rice grains and foodstuffs. Then he shows them the bronze mirror and kindles the incense. Then he fans the *cibhā* and other Buddha images with a yak tail and rings a bell. As the priest explained, the fanning is to cool the deity. Then again he throws rice and pieces of flowers to the *cibhā* and other Buddhas in all the four corners of the temple and walks around the *cibhā* four times. While circling the *cibhā* he begs forgiveness for the mistakes he unknowingly makes during the worship. After the completion of the worship, he drinks a little water, puts a piece of flower



on his head and distributes flowers to the visitors as blessing (*prasāda*). Then he comes out of the temple and closes the door, locks it up and moves to the temple of Hyāṁkḥvāḥ māju.

### ***Worship at Hyāṁkḥvāḥ māju***

Entering the temple of Hyāṁkḥvāḥ māju, he pours yoghurt in a bowl. Then he consecrates the plate for worship by ringing a bell. Then he pours the yoghurt onto a plate called *bhinābhu*. It has a small pinnacle in the centre that represents the goddess Hyāṁkḥvāḥ māju, so, according to the explanation of the priest, the water on the plate obtains pureness. The priest adds some water to the yoghurt on the plate and worships the pinnacle by offering *ṭikā*, flower and rice to the goddess. Immediately after this act, he worships the goddess Hyāṁkḥvāḥ māju with rice and flowers. Then he makes a fire in a firepot made for incense (*gumgū makah*), carries it in his right hand and a bell in his left hand and thus walks around the deities in the temple of Hyāṁkḥvāḥ māju. Then he walks towards the wall behind the images of Hyāṁkḥvāḥ māju, Siṁhinī and Byāghrinī to worship the image of Vasundharā. Then he pours more water on the plate with yoghurt from the *kalaśa*. With a little water from the plate he washes the silver mirror (*jvalānhāykaṁ*), and then shows the mirror to the goddess. As the priest explained, it represents the goddess's act of make-up. He places the mirror below the plate (*bhinābhu*) after showing it to the deities. He waves with a yak tail fan to the devotees standing outside the entrance and fans the goddess and himself, and a *damaru*<sup>36</sup> drum is played by one of the devotees. Then the priest picks up a string with 108 beads (*japamā*), sits at the right corner of the temple and begins counting them three times. As the priest told me the meditation (*japa*) was to invoke the goddess Hyāṁkḥvāḥ māju. Immediately after the *japa*, he burns a bundle of incense. Carrying the bundle of incense in his right hand and a bell in his left hand, the priest walks around the deities. Then he lights some wicks, throws some rice grains and flowers to the deities and circles the deities three times again. Then he bows to the deities, drinks some holy water (*jala*), puts flowers on his own head, and puts a *ṭikā* on his forehead. Only then does he begin distributing *jala*, flowers and *ṭikā* to visitors standing outside the gate. The priest said that it is necessary to put on the *ṭikā* himself first, because as a priest he is the main person representing the goddess in the temple. The priest distributes *jala*, *ṭikā* and flowers to visitors as a blessing from the goddess. As the priest explained, to sprinkle *jala* is to purify or to clean the person who asks for *ṭikā* and flowers, because in principle only those who are pure and clean in body and mind

are supposed to receive blessings from the goddess. As the priest finishes his worship at Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, he takes the same plate to the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple after adding some materials for worship. The priest told me that Hyāumkhvāḥ māju and Mhāsukhvāḥ māju are not two different goddesses but the same in two different forms, and so he can use the same plate for both the goddesses. On his way to the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple he also worships all the images of gods and goddesses he passes.

### ***Worship at the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple***

At the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju he first begins his worship on the second floor to the goddess Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, and to Simhinī, Byāghrinī, Vasundharā, and the images of the two Buddhas. He begins the worship by sprinkling some holy water on all the deities, and then offers rice grains, *ṭikā*, and flowers to them all. Outsiders are not allowed inside the room of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju during the worship. He finishes the worship after offering wick lights and incense. Then he moves down to the first floor where the processional statue of *cibhā* is placed. He first pours some water over the statue of *cibhā*, the head of Vikramāditya and the frying pan and offers *ṭikā*, flowers and rice grains to them all. As soon as he has finished the worship, he heads towards the fire pit where he first sprinkles some water, then offers all the worshipping materials as he did to the other deities. Then he goes down to the ground floor. There he throws some rice in a gesture of worship, but there are no images of any deities and the worship is meant to be to the temple itself, as the priest said. He comes out from the rear gate of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple situated on the ground floor. He walks to the stone spouts situated in the northeast corner of the Hyāumkhvāḥ māju temple, and there he washes his hands and feet. Then he enters the Hyāumkhvāḥ māju temple. For several hours he remains busy in the temple receiving visitors' offerings for the goddess and giving them *jala*, *ṭikā* and flowers in return as a blessing from her. At about twelve in the morning, he stops his duties at the temple and after he comes out of the temple, closes its gate and heads towards the temple of Jogeśvara.

### **The noon rituals**

Entering the temple of Jogeśvara the priest picks up the wooden pestle and stick. Standing in front of the temple gate he repeats the beating of the pestle as he did in the early morning. After putting the pestle and stick

back in the temple, he closes the temple gate and locks it up for security reasons. Then he moves to the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple. After the completion of the noon worship, people are not allowed to ring bells. On the ground floor of the temple, he first cleans up and begins cooking food for the deities and for himself. Cleanliness and purity are essential, so only the priest on duty is allowed to cook the food for the deities.

As soon as the food is cooked, he puts three portions of it on three special silver plates (*thāybhū*), and he also puts milk in three small silver bowls. Then he puts sixteen portions of food on leaves. Three portions he throws out of the door in the name of Mahākāla, Aṣṭamātrkā, and Gaṇeśa. One portion he puts on the ground (*jagati*), one he puts on the main gate of the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju temple, one in the name of Guṃgaṇeśa, and one to the eternal fire. He takes three portions to the room of the processional statue of *cibhā*: one for the *cibhā*, one for Vikramāditya's head and one for the frying pan.

Together with the remaining portions of the food he carries three silver plates containing food to Mhāsukhvāḥ māju's room. When he walks towards Mhāsukhvāḥ māju's room, he sprinkles water from a silver pot to purify the path. He places all three silver plates on three different three-legged iron stands (*trikhuṭṭi*) in front of the statue of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. Then he worships all the deities in the room. As the priest explained, the worship is to request the deities to accept food. From each plate he picks up a small portion of food and puts it below the plates in a gesture of offering. He also pours milk from the bowls over the food. This is the end of the offering of food to the deities. After the completion of the food offering, he goes down to the ground floor where he cooks food for himself. After taking his meal, he rests for a few hours. During the day it is usually quiet in the Vajrayoginī sanctuary, because the temple doors remain closed. The people hardly visit the temple in the day. The priest explained that after his morning duties, the gods and goddesses leave the temple to look around in the world.

### The Afternoon rituals

In the early afternoon the priest opens the temple of Jogeśvara, after having washed his hands and feet at the stone spouts situated to the north of the Jogeśvara temple. This time again, he brings out the wooden pestle and beats it 108 times as he does in the morning. Then he brings it back to the temple and closes its gate and begins ringing the bells. The afternoon bell is to inform the people that the gods and goddesses are around, so they can offer food to them. This bell also reminds the people of Sankhu,

especially those who work in the fields, of the time for their afternoon meal. After the ringing of the bells, the priest enters the temple of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju. This time it is only to clean the temple with a broom (*tuphi*). Then he goes back to Mhāsukhvāḥ māju's temple to take a rest.

### Evening worship (*ārati*)

At about six in the evening, the priest washes his hands and feet at the stone spouts situated at the northeast corner of the temple of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, and then he enters the temple of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju. There he prepares the worship plates for the evening worship. For the evening worship he needs only rice grains, wicks, beaten rice and leaves. He also lights the firepot for incense (*gumgumakah*) and lights a special lamp (*sukundā*) and an oil lamp with a stand (*tvādevā*). First he washes the leaves, puts three portions of beaten rice on them by way of offering it to the deities (Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, Simhinī and Byāghrinī), he touches them with the leaves with beaten rice, and then throws the beaten rice with the leaves out of the gate. In the evening, only beaten rice is used as food for the deities because the priest can also only eat beaten rice in the evening. As the priest explained, to purify the deities it is necessary to touch them with leaves containing beaten rice and throw the leaves and beaten rice out of the temple.

After the offering of food, he first walks around the deities with the firepot in his right hand and a bell in his left hand, the second time he goes around with a wick light in his right hand and a bell in his left hand, and the third time he goes around the deities fanning them with a yak tail. It is necessary to go round the deities to inform them about the evening worship (*ārati*). Then he begins the *japa* with the 108 beads, and after that he goes round the deities a final time and bows to them to beg forgiveness for any mistakes that may have occurred unknowingly during the day. Then he puts flowers on his head from the deities and distributes the flowers to those who are present in front of the entrance during the evening worship (*ārati*). After the completion of the *ārati* he brings out some of the deities' ornaments and puts them on a silver bowl and covers them with a silver plate. Then from a cupboard he brings out some pieces of shining cloth (*tās*) and a large piece of red cloth. First he covers the hands of the goddess Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, Simhinī and Byāghrinī each with a piece of shining cloth. Then he covers their faces with other small pieces of shining cloth. Lastly he covers up their whole bodies with a large piece of red cloth. Before he steps out of the temple, he carefully puts out the oil lamp and carries out the lighted *sukundā*. Covering up the bodies of the

deities with cloth and putting out the light are for security purposes, as the priest explained. He locks up the entrance to the temple.

Then he enters the temple of Jogeśvara. There, he offers a portion of beaten rice on a leaf and worships the *cibhā* by offering rice, wicks and incense. Then he comes out with the wooden pestle to beat it as he does in the daytime and places it back in the temple. Again he goes around the *cibhā* with a bell in his hand, and then he comes out of the temple and locks its gate. For the last time, he rings the big bells for that day. Other people present at the sanctuary help him with the ringing of other bells. According to the priest the evening bell marks the end of the daily rituals at the temple and ends the worshipping of the deities in the sanctuary for that day.

When he walks towards the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju he offers a leaf with beaten rice and lighted wicks to all the deities on his way. He also offers leaves with beaten rice, lights and incense to all the deities and the eternal fire at the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. According to the priest, beaten rice is not only considered to be the evening food for the deities but is also considered to be a purifying item. He said that offering beaten rice is necessary to purify the temple from the defilement caused by opening it, so this is necessary every evening. Including cooking, the offering of the food is done by the priest himself alone, without involving his wife.

### **The repainting (*lampuṃchāyegu*) of Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju**

Usually the repainting of the main statue of the Vajrayoginī (Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju) takes place every twelve years. During the twelve-yearly repainting ceremony, the Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī statues from her temple and Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī statues from the two other temples are also carried out together with Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju. The repainting work is in fact the maintenance and renewal of a statue. The priest told me that during the repainting ceremony, no reconstruction of a statue is done, but it is a ceremony only to carry out necessary repairs on the statues and to repaint them. According to him, the repainting work must be carried out during the winter solstice (*uttararāyaṇa*), and before the end of the summer solstice (*dakṣiṇāyaṇa*) it should be ended. The winter solstice begins in mid-January and towards mid-July it ends. Three Newar castes, namely Vajrācārya, Śākya and Citrakār, have to play various roles during the repainting work.

There are several historical notes to be found in different chronicles about the repainting of the goddess Vajrayoginī. The MMC (folio 30) tells that in 1646 (NS 766) the repainting of Vajrayoginī was carried out during

the time of Vajrācārya Bekhādeva, and the king was Lakṣminarasimha Deva. This is the oldest note I found about the repainting.

The last repainting of the Vajrayoginī took place in May 1998. It began on 7 May and ended on 3 July. During my interviews, none of the Vajrācārya priests were clear about the history of *lampumchāyegu*. Some said it began with the tradition of the procession of the goddess. Another said that this tradition began three to four hundred years ago. Premman Citrakār, who did the repainting work in 1998, said that his forefathers got on to this work many generations ago. He said a colophon in his possession says that his ancestors moved from Sankhu to Chabahil in AD 1599 and later to Bhimsensthan. Vajrayoginī is also their *digu dyo*, or the ancestor's family deity. The general public is not allowed to observe most of the activities of repainting, such as the repainting of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. As I was not present in person during the repainting, I shall present an account here of the ceremony from some interviews I had with the priests and the painters.<sup>37</sup>

### Purification (*puraścaraṇa*)

A Joṣī, a Newar astrologer from Patan,<sup>38</sup> has to find an auspicious date (*sāita*) for the ceremony. One of the priests has to carry a shallow earthen pot full of rice, together with a betel nut and a coin (*kisali*) to the astrologer from Sankhu. Then the astrologer writes down the auspicious day and time for the ceremony on a piece of paper. In 1998, he fixed 7 May as the day to begin the purification ritual (*puraścaraṇa*). The five oldest Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu carry out the purification ritual. During this ritual one of the priests has to recite the *japa* 125,000 times<sup>39</sup> for each deity to be repainted. The *puraścaraṇa* ritual is accomplished within three, five or seven days. In 1998, it was concluded within five days. Besides the *japa*, they also have to perform daily worship (*nitya pūjā*), the worship of divine serpents (*nāga pūjā*), and a secret kind of worship (*guhya pūjā*) for five days.

### Choylābhu (festive food)

This is the day of feasting for the priests. On this day, after worship of the deities, they begin their feast. In the evening during the main feast, the five oldest priests are offered food with great honour, because they need to take various responsibilities during the repainting. The *munāyo* or the oldest one receives boiled meat, the second oldest receives beaten rice, the third oldest receives a kind of bean (*bhuti*), the fourth one receives peas

(*kayagu*), and the fifth one receives soybeans. Accepting these foods they ritually bind themselves to perform the necessary duties during the repainting ceremony. For the purpose of the 1998 renovation, the Choylābhū was done on 12 May.

### **Nyās pikāyegu (removing life)**

This ceremony is to remove the divine spirit from the statues to be repainted and to place them in a holy jar (*kalaśa*). It is also done at an auspicious time set by the astrologer. In 1998, it was done in the morning between 07:39 and 07:54 of 13 May. Before the spirits are placed in the *kalaśa*, it is filled with water from five confluences and five ponds around the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. According to a priest, five is an auspicious number and to combine water from five confluences is to purify the spirits of the goddesses. As he told me, it is also a *tantric* process for preserving the life of the deities until the repainting is concluded. He said that as soon as the life is removed from a statue it becomes powerless, and then the repainting and repairing work can be done. Five Sākyas of Kathmandu do the repairing. They inherited this duty from their forefathers. For their duties they are rewarded with cash, which is negotiated on each occasion because there is no *guthi* land to pay for their duties. Each time they come to perform their duties, they need to undergo a ritual initiation by the Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu.<sup>40</sup> According to a priest they have to take twelve kinds of *dikṣā* for various purposes.

### **Ranga kotana yāyegu (arranging colours)**

A day after the completion of the repair of the statues, the painters (Citrakār) take their turn. Their main task is to repaint the statues. In the past, a group of five painters from Kathmandu Bhimsensthan used to come for this work, but in 1998 only two of them<sup>41</sup> came, because other families had given up traditional painting work. The painters also receive a ritual initiation each time they come for the repainting. During the period of painting, the painters need to observe several rules that, among other things, prohibit them from eating chicken and chicken eggs. The painting of colour takes the longest time in this ceremony. In 1998 it took twenty-three days (17 May to 8 June) for two painters to accomplish this work. They were paid about one thousand dollars for this work. In an interview, Premman Citrakār told me that he removed at least fifty layers of old paint from the statue of Hyāumkhuṇḍā māju that enabled him to see the original appearance of the goddess as she was six hundred years ago. In the past,

many of his ancestors simply carried out repainting over the layers of old paint, but he took the risk of removing all the old layers to see the original appearance of the goddess. However, he refused to disclose any details about the materials and iconographic details of the goddess, because of the prior ritual initiation he had taken.<sup>42</sup>

### **Dr̥ṣṭīdāna (offering of eyes)**

The final act of painting is the offering or opening of the eyes (*dr̥ṣṭīdāna*) of the deities. This was done a day after the conclusion of the painting work on 9 June 1998. There was a conflict between the painters and the Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu about the right to paint eyes in 1998. According to some Vajrācārya priests, the painting of the eyes is the priests' task, while the painter, Premman Citrakār, found this ridiculous. He said the opening of the eyes is one of the important parts of painting and it is the final task from his side. He claimed that this is also written in the ritual manual he has to follow for the painting of the goddess. According to Gautamvajra, one of the Vajrācārya priest in Sankhu, their forefathers used to do the whole job of painting, but later on, as they became unable to do it themselves, the job was delegated to painters. He claimed that the Vajrācārya priests must continue the crucial task of opening the eyes. In the end, the painters did all the work, including the painting of eyes. The conflict concerned only the act of painting the pupils of the eyes, which is the final stage of the painting. This act is carried out after worship is performed according to the time set by the astrologer. Although the priests carried out the act of painting the pupils of the eyes, it was not considered ritually correct, so the painters were given the chance to repeat the same act on 29 June. This ended their conflict. As Premman Citrakār told me, the Vajrācārya priests had to offer worship to the goddess as an apology for their mistake.

### **Daśakarmavidhi (the tenfold life cycle rites)**

After the completion of the opening of the eyes, the ten series of life cycle rituals (*daśakarma vidhi*) were performed on 24 June. During this ceremony all the necessary life cycle rituals are performed, like for a person in Newar society, and this includes birth purification, name giving, *ihī*, the ritual marriage, twelve days of confinement (*bārḥā tayegu*), the shaving of the head and marriage. For both Buddhists and Hindus it is essential to perform the tenfold life cycle rites before deities are reinstalled.<sup>43</sup>



### Choylābhu (festive food)

After the completion of the life cycle ritual, the priests as well as those who have contributed money for the painting gather for a feast (*choylābhu*). It is the second feast in the sequence of the ceremony. This feast is also considered to be the celebration of the completion of the renovation. In 1998 it took place on 29 June.

### Nyāsa luyegu (pouring of life)

Nyāsa luyegu is the ritual act of giving life back to the repainted statues. This is also done at the auspicious time set by the astrologer. First, the four statues of Siṃhinī and Byāghrinī receive life, followed by Hyāṃkḥvāḥ māju. This is also called *jivadāna*, or the giving of life. In 1998 it was done on 30 June.

### Duso

On this day the *kalaśa* containing water from five confluences and five ponds receive special worship in the temple of Hyāṃkḥvāḥ māju. Two priests perform it secretly by the offering of a shallow earthen pot containing rice, betel nut and a coin (*kisali*.) Then the *kalaśa* is carried out from the temple and emptied at the Mahākāla Bhairava shrine. Afterward it is cleaned with the water from the stone spout Jogdhārā and carried back to the temple. The *kalaśa* is placed on the breast of the statue of Hyāṃkḥvāḥ māju. It remains there for twelve years until the repainting work is resumed the next time. A priest told me that after twelve years the water in the *kalaśa* turns into medicinal pure alcohol and this is distributed among Vajrācārya priests as a blessing. The *duso* ritual was performed on 1 July in 1998.

### Palisthā (installation)

The final act of the repainting is the installation (*pratisthā* or *palisthā*) of the deities; it was done on 2 July 1998. On this day, the repainted deities receive full life. Flags made of cloth (*patā*) are offered to the temple. Then the pinnacle of the Hyāṃkḥvāḥ māju temple also receives worship. A priest told me that it contains a small statue of Hyāṃkḥvāḥ māju with a white dress. The eldest Vajrācārya priest and his wife have to pour twelve rice pastries (*yomari*) from the top roof of the temple. This effectively marks the end of the rituals for the twelve-yearly repainting ceremony.

### Caturthiyāyegu (ritual of apology)

After the completion of all the procedures of repainting, one additional ritual called *caturthi yāyegu* is performed on the day following Palisthā. It is also called *kṣemā pūjā* or the ‘worship of apology’. The repainting work is done once in twelve years and is a big event consisting of a number of rituals to be performed in a time span of about two months. For this reason, it is likely that small or large mistakes may have occurred during those days. The apology is to correct those unseen mistakes and to pray for forgiveness. The apology can be called the concluding act of worship which ends the whole set of rituals related to the repainting (*laṃpumchāyegu*) and gives rest to all those involved in the rituals for the next twelve years. In 1998 the concluding worship took place on 3 July.

### Renovation of the Mhāsukhvā māju

The renovation or the repainting of the Mhāsukhvāh māju, also called *palisthā* (Skt. *pratisthā*), is incidental, while the repainting (*laṃpumchāyegu*) of the Lion-faced (Siṃhinī), Tiger-faced (Byāghrinī) and the Red-faced mother (Hyāumkhvāh māju) is done once every twelve years. The renovation takes place only when the Yellow-faced mother is incidentally dented or damaged. Although the MM tells us that the construction of the processional statues of the goddess Vajrayoginī and *cibhā* was done according to an instruction given by the goddess herself to her priest in Kaligata year 1818, no other historical notes have been found to prove its authenticity. However, there are several historical notes about the renovation of Mhāsukhvāh māju to be found in the SSS, the MMC and MMC-I. One such note found in the MMC-I tells that, because no renovation was carried out immediately when the two legs of Ekajāṭī (Mhāsukhvāh māju) were broken, a great epidemic was inflicted on the country. It was stopped only after the renovation of the statue was carried out on the twelfth of Phālguna Śukla 1625 (745 NS). The SSS also tells about the renovation of Mhāsukhvāh māju that took place in AD 1625 (NS 745). It says:

“The statue of Ekajāṭā (Mhāsukhvā māju) had become dilapidated and the renovation was done with a *ahorātri yajña*. Then the main priest (*mūlācārya*) was Jñanakritti Deva and it was completed by king Lakṣminarasimha Malla Deva.”<sup>44</sup>

According to a priest, it was in 1944 that the last renovation of the Yellow-faced mother took place. For the first time in 53 years, on 20 January

1997, the renovation of this deity and that of the processional statue of the *cibhā* was performed again. This commenced on 17 December 1996. During the renovation I was not present, so my description of the renovation is based on interviews with the priests and a booklet published by the renovation committee.

According to a senior priest, one of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju's legs was broken at the time of the procession, so a renovation was inevitable. The necessity for a renovation of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju was felt already in 1992 and a renovation committee (*Sankhu Vajrayoginī Sudhār Samiti*) was formed under the leadership of five senior (*thakāli*) Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu in January 1992 (20 Māgha 2049 VS). However, it was not easy to collect the funds because the amount needed was huge. It was only in August 1995 (28 Śāvaṇa 2052) that the committee delivered a letter to the Guthi Cooperation requesting financial support. In March 1996, the Cooperation made available one hundred thousand Nepalese rupees (about US\$ 1,700) to the committee, but this was insufficient. Later, they raised about US\$ 3,400 in cash from individual donors and about 500 grams of gold valued at about US\$ 5,000 and other necessary materials. Names of the donors are listed in a booklet published by the renovation committee. It shows that most of the donors were from Sankhu, followed by Kathmandu and other places. Many individuals also contributed free labour during the renovation work. The total expense of the renovation came to about US\$ 12,000.<sup>45</sup>

A series of rituals was performed during the renovation. On 17 December 1996 (1 Māgha 2053 VS) a 'worship of apology' (*kṣemā pūjā*) was performed to begin the renovation. According to a priest, *kṣemā pūjā* was necessary in order to request the goddess to grant her permission to undertake the big job of renovation without disturbances. From Māgha 2 to 6 a preparatory rite (*puraścaraṇa*) was performed. It was a kind of worship done by the five oldest priests of Sankhu. Then on 7 Māgha, the invocation of water (*jala āvḥāna*) was done. For this purpose, water from the nine ponds was collected. Then the life invocation (*jīva nyāsa*) rite was performed to remove life from the Mhāsukhvāḥ māju and *Cibhā* statues. On the same morning, at an auspicious moment set by an astrologer, a *kalaśa* was installed to store the lives of the statues.

The following morning, after the worship of the cow (*gomātā*), the painting (*ranga kotanegu*) was done. From the day of 9 Māgha, the counting of gold (*niyegu*) began and on 11 Māgha, the gilding (*siyegu*) with copper began. Seven people were involved in this task, while four others were engaged in woodwork. The five *thakāli* priests had to perform a daily act of worship for the whole period of the renovation. Each day, the

renovation work had to be carried out and concluded according to the auspicious time set by the astrologer. A worship of apology (*kṣemā pūjā*) also had to be performed daily by one of the *thakāli* until the renovation work was completed. The renovation work was completed on 24 Māgha.

On 25 Māgha, a twelve-day long non-stop fire sacrifice (*Ahorātri Mahā yajña*) began, which ended on 7 Phālguna. This fire sacrifice was to invite various deities (*tetisa koṭi dya*) as the witness for the ceremony. Each of these twelve days was also reserved for a particular ritual ceremony: 25 Māgha was the day for the collection of holy water (*yacim kāye*) from the five confluences (*tīrtha*) and five ponds (*kunḍa*) around Vajrayoginī and Sankhu, 26 Māgha was the day to worship the god of music and dance (*Nāsaḥ dya*), 27 was the day for the major worship (*mula siddha pūjā*), 28 was the day for completion of worshipping the feet (*padasādhana*) and entering the *mandala*, 29 Māgha was the day for a secret act of worship called *gaṇacakra*, the first day of the month of Phālguna was the day for purification (*nisi duso*), 2 Phālguna was the day for drawing *māṇḍalā* and the pouring of *nyāsa* (this ceremony is the ritual to give life to the renovated statues), 3 Phālguna was the day for performing the preliminary purification of the images (*adhivāsāna*) and worship of *tripaṇcāla kalaśa*, 4 Phālguna was the day for the installation of fire (*agnisthāpanā*) and performing the ten series of life cycle rituals (*daśakarma vidhi*), 5 Phālguna was the completion of renovation (*pratisthā purnā*), 6 Phālguna was the day for offering light (*matakāye*) and *raja pvāha* (?) and 7 Phālguna was the final day for ritual and final sacrifices (*ākhalitaye, visarjana śeṣavali*).

Besides the five *thakāli* priests of Sankhu, two priests from Kathmandu, one from Sabalbāhāḥ and another from Janabāhāḥ presided over the fire sacrifice. Four other priests were engaged in worshipping (*pūjā thākulī*). A priest from Makhaṃbāhāḥ, Kathmandu performed the duties of a reciter (*vācaka*). Eight Vajrācārya from Bhaktapur and thirteen Vajrācārya from various monasteries of Kathmandu carried out the playing of Gitācārya and Paṃcatāl music. Daily plates for worship were prepared by some of the wives of the priests.

## Conclusion

Our discussion makes it clear that Guṃbāhāḥ or the Vajrayoginī sanctuary is the oldest Buddhist site in the Valley of Nepal. The historical data presented in this Chapter provide ample evidence to prove this fact. As we have seen, royal patronage of this site has continued from the Licchavi times till the present day. During the Malla period, and after their

downfall, kings and nobles continued supporting ritual activities and kept up the maintenance of the temples, gods and goddesses in the sanctuary. I have used inscriptional data and manuscripts to provide historical insight into the Vajrayoginī sanctuary and its importance. I assume these written sources can provide a historical view of the area. As the historian Dhanavajra noted, the temple of Jogeśvara *Cibhā* or the enshrined *Caitya* was once the most important site in the sanctuary, as we can still observe during the daily worship performed by the priests at the sanctuary. In the morning, the priest begins his worship first at the Jogeśvara temple, then at noon, in the afternoon, and in the evening he has to perform worship and beat the wooden pestle (*simgam*) there. Such attention is not given to other gods and goddesses in the sanctuary. The beating of a wooden pestle is one of the oldest traditions and can be seen only in a few Buddhist shrines (*bāhāh*). This tradition also indicates its antiquity.

Our discussion of the physical appearance of the sanctuary is meant to provide a clear picture of the area and the significance of all the religious monuments in the sanctuary. With its temples, statues of gods and goddesses, holy ponds, spouts and rock caves, the hill of Vajrayoginī is a perfect religious site. The main temples in this sanctuary are the temples of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, Jogeśvara and Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. The long tradition of equal respect shown by both Hindus and Buddhists to the deities in this sanctuary leaves no doubt that the distinction between Hinduism and Buddhism scarcely plays any role among the people of the Valley. Devotees who pay visits to this Sanctuary worship all the deities there. However, their main focus is on the fixed statue of the goddess Vajrayoginī (Hyāumkhvāḥ māju) in the pagoda temple and her processional statue (Mhāsukhvāḥ māju). For them, both are equally important as different manifestations of a single goddess. The goddess, as the ruler of the three worlds (*tribhuvanayā rānī*), it is believed not only rewards people but also has to penalise wrongdoers. Because of this power of the goddess, people in general as well as kings and nobles must take care not to enrage her, lest she cause great harm. The SSS, MMC and the MMC-I regularly refer to calamities she inflicts on the people, the country and kings. One of the notes in the MMC (folio 27) relates that in 1570 (690 NS), during the evening worship at the temple of the goddess Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, her dress caught fire, and this immediately caused a trembling of the earth. This was reported to king Mahindra Malla who provided the necessary sums for the repainting of the goddess. As we stated above, another note says that in 1625 (NS 745), when the two legs of the processional statue of Vajrayoginī broke, a great disturbance occurred throughout the Valley. Unknown diseases killed many people

and measles caused the death of numerous children. The worship of gods and goddesses as well as the crossroads (*dokā*) was performed, but to no avail; life returned to normal only after the completion of the renovation (MMC folio 29-30). These sorts of notes clearly refer to the power of the goddess Vajrayoginī embedded in the minds of the Nepalese.

In this Chapter, I have discussed the repainting and renovation of the goddesses Hyāumkhvāḥ māju and Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. The rituals performed during the repainting for both goddesses are in a way the renewal of the deities or a renewal of the lives of the deities. This also gives the impression that, as the guardians of the goddess Vajrayoginī, the priests are able to control the lives of the goddesses by their *tāntrik* power until the work of repainting is completed. In this respect the removing of life (*nyāsa pikāyegu*) and the reinstallation of life (*nyāsa luigu*) are the most crucial rituals performed during the repainting work. Images are supposedly lifeless during the time the repainting work is being executed. The repainted images of deities receive their life back only after the *nyāsa luigu* ritual has been performed; only then do the deities regain their power. However, the divine power of the goddess is unlimited and uncontrollable. She can travel wherever she wants and she can do whatever she likes.

## APPENDIX TO CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE WAY OF WORSHIP OF THE GODDESS VAJRAYOGINĪ AND THE MERITS ONE GAINS, AS DESCRIBED IN THE TEXT OF MAṆĪŚAILA MAHĀVADĀNA

Anyone who bathes Vajrayoginī with pure water and five sacred liquids (*pañcāmṛta*), being unpolluted in his mind, will have a chance to bathe in the celestial sea, gain all happiness and go to the *sukhāvātī bhuvana* (the heavenly abode imagined by religious Buddhists) in the end.

One who worships the goddess by offering incense mixed with sandalwood (*śrikhaṇḍa*) and the oyster-like gland of the musk deer (*kasturī*) will get a very beautiful body, the gods and goddesses will honour him and he will become a wealthy and fortunate person.

One who pleases the goddess by smearing her with fragrances will have his purse filled with all seven precious jewels and in his next life he will become a king.

One who offers the goddess varieties of dresses will receive invaluable dresses and will become an enlightened person in his next life.

One who presents the goddess with all possible varieties of flowers grown on the earth and water will enjoy a long life as king, become proficient in *bodhiḥjñāna* and liberation from life.

One who presents the goddess with varieties of garlands will become prosperous and gods and goddesses will honour him in his next life.

One who presents the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī with purified butter lights to destroy darkness will become capable of destroying the darkness of ignorance, kings will honour him and he will be the person who takes the vow of *bodhicaryā*.

One who presents the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī with varieties of sweetmeats and food and one who offers her blessing food (*sagam*) with meat and liquor together with five holy Buddhist letters (*pañcākṣara*) will become king of kings and he will have all seven jewels.

One who offers the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī fruits such as the banana, pomegranate, *prunus puddum*, guava, apple, orange, *calladium armacia*, cucumber, radish, and so on and sings devotional songs will obtain a blissful life as well as secure place in the heaven.

One who offers medicines to the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī and sings devotional songs will become healthy and strong.

One who plays different drums in front of the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī will go to heaven.

One who offers the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī worship with rice, popped rice, and flowers will get rid of all the sins he or she has accumulated.

One who offers the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī items of food together with betel leaves, betel nuts and cloves will get rid of all sins and go to heaven.

One who offers the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī umbrellas made of gold, silver, copper, cloth, and so on will become a great emperor in his rebirth and go to the *sukhāvati bhuvana*.

One who offers the goddess with metal, jewels and devotional songs will become the richest of rich and when he dies will go to heaven.

One who recites *dhāraṇī* in front of the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī will become the Buddha Mahāsatva and will become a protector of people.

One who restores or renovates the temple of the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī will achieve health and wealth, he will practise a virtuous life and will become a great person.

One who cleans around her temple and surrounding places and sings devotional songs will get a healthy life, will practise meritorious conduct and will become such a person who takes the vow of *bodhicaryā*.

One who tells this story of the goddess Ugratārā Vajrayoginī as told by the Buddha Śākyamuni to others will achieve a happy life in this world as well as in heavenly abode.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### THE ANNUAL FESTIVAL OF VAJRAYOGINĪ

#### Introduction

As has been discussed in the preceding Chapters, Vajrayoginī is one of the most important goddesses of Nepal. Besides being a divinity of national importance with a long-attested history, Vajrayoginī is also the protective goddess of Sankhu town. In that regard the goddess has many features in common with the protective deities of other Newar towns, but also has a few peculiarities. As shown in the preceding Chapter, the processional statues of Vajrayoginī and her company are not kept in Sankhu town, but in Guṃ Vihāra, the forest monastery itself. Every Newar town has a main divinity and a main festival. The main shrine of the divinity may be outside the town, but a “home” is maintained in the town as well, the so-called *dyo chem*, “god-house.” The peculiarity of Sankhu is that the town’s main deity does not have a downtown home at all, and does not require one either. The people of Sankhu are happy that the goddess grants their town a once-a-year visit. The rituals and artistic details, the specialists, the items of worship, are all Newar, yet the goddess herself has to come down from the Tāmāṅ jungle territory to grace Sankhu with an eight-day visit annually. Hence Vajrayoginī cannot be called the protective goddess just of Sankhu town.

According to the legend *Maṇisaila Mahāvadāna*, as soon as the construction of the Kingdom of Sankhu was completed, king Śaṅkhadeva began the procession of the goddess Vasundharā. A couple of years after the construction of the town, Vajrayoginī expressed a wish to her priest Jogadeva to be carried down to town in a procession once a year. For this purpose, she instructed him to make a golden statue of her own with ‘Ekajātī Buddhimātā’ as her name. She also instructed him to make a golden statue of a Buddhist Caitya Bharāḍa (Cibhā), and of the Lion-faced (Siṃhinī) and the Tiger-faced (Byāghrinī) guardians. When the construction of the four statues was completed, the procession was carried out from the year 1818 Kaligata.<sup>1</sup> From that year onwards the festival of Vajrayoginī began by taking the processional statues down to the town

from the temple every year in March/April (Caitra Śukla Purnimā). The MM also tells that on the fourth day, the main day of the procession (*Mū jātrā*) of the festival, the goddess herself would appear in the palanquin and grant an audience to king Śaṅkhadeva.

If we were to believe the MM, the tradition of the festival of the goddess is now almost three thousand three hundred years old. Including Prakashman, a local scholar, many people in Sankhu are inclined to believe this myth (Prakashman 1998a:3). However, we lack historical authenticity to prove if indeed the festival has existed for so many centuries. Two nineteenth-century chronicles, Bhāṣāvaṃśāvalī and Padmagiri's Vaṃśāvalī, claim king Surya Malla (1520-1530) as the founder of the procession of Vajrayoginī (see Lamsal 1966:56 and Hasrat 1970:62-3). The first note about the festival in the SSS (*Śānti Svasti Saphū*) dated 1542 reads:

On Caitra Śukla Purnimā 1542 (NS 662) the goddess was brought down to the town between full-moon day (Śukla Purnimā) and the first day of dark half (Pāru) of the lunar month of Caitra (folio 4b).

The MMC provides general instructions to carry out the procession of Vajrayoginī. This text contains a guide for the festival, from the rituals preceding the festival to the concluding day's rituals. I obtained this text from a Vajrācārya priest in 1999, and my observation of the festival more or less fits the instructions given in this text. So in the context of the discussion of the festival, I will refer to this text frequently.

The three '*Gāuṃ Vikās Samiti* or Village Development Committees (VDC) take turns performing duties for one year; each VDC gets its turn once every four years, as the festive deities come to rest in their respective quarters, of which there are four. Each year the sequence of the VDC is as follows:

1. Dhomlā quarter of Pukhulāchi VDC
2. Calākhu quarter of Vajrayoginī VDC
3. Imlā quarter of Pukhulāchi VDC and
4. Suntol quarter of Suntol VDC.

There are only three VDCs in Sankhu. Since Dhomlātōl and Imlātōl lie in Pukhulāchi VDC it gets two turns in four years. Imlā quarter, where the Pukhulāchi VDC building now stands, is considered as the old palace site of the town. Many activities in the festival begin from this quarter. The Vajrācārya priests' residences are concentrated in the Dhomlā quarter, where the secret worship house (*āgaṃchem*) of the priests is also located.

The procession of Vasundharā, which is carried out in the midst of the Vajrayoginī festival is also held at the same place.

### The ritual events

The festival of Vajrayoginī begins on the day of Caitra Śukla or Caulāthva Aṣṭamī (which is either towards the end of March or in early April), the day of invitation (Nimantraṇa), with a special act of worship at the Vajrayoginī temple, an announcement of the festival in the town, and the performance of a secret fire sacrifice in front of the Hyāumkhvāḥ māju temple. The major activities of the festival can be listed in the following way:

1. *Dyo bvanegu* or *Nimantraṇa*: the day of invitation and announcement of the festival in the town and of the performance of the secret fire sacrifice in front of the Vajrayoginī temple, eight days before the day on which the processional statues are brought down into the town.
2. *Jujuyā taruvā haigu*: the bringing of the royal sword from Kathmandu representing the king at the festival, four days after the day of invitation.
3. *Gvasim hayegu*: the bringing of the wood, also four days after the day of *Nimantraṇa* (to be burned in the middle of the festival for the procurement of sacred ashes).
4. *Kvahām bijyā*: bringing the processional statues down from their forest temple to the town, on the full-moon day of Caitra, eight days after the *Nimantraṇa*.
5. *Sunyakā*: a day of inactivity (processional statues installed in the *dyo sataḥ*, the divine rest house) on the day following the procession.
6. *Syākvatyākva* and *Nakhaḥ*: a day of sacrifices and feasts on the next day.
7. *Mū jātrā*: the main procession of the statues around town on the fourth day of the festival.
8. *Mū bijyā*: main day of festive celebration a day after the *Mū jātrā*.
9. *Dhum bijyā*: completion of the festive celebration on the day after the *Mū bhujyā*.
10. *Bauyā*: secret rice offerings to the ghosts on the day after *Dhumbijyā*.
11. *Thahām bijyā*: bringing the processional statues up from the town to their forest temple on the *Bauyā*.

12. *Bicāḥ pūjā*: final worship in the temple, ‘the making of the balance’, three days after the *Thahām bijyā*.

Besides these major activities, many other activities take place during the festival in which different people belonging to different castes fulfil various duties. I shall describe these in detail below.

### **The day of the invitation (*Dyo bvanegu* or *Nimantraṇa*)**

Every year, the activities of the festival begin eight days before the processional statues are brought down from the forest temple to the town. On this day, *Dyo bvanegu*, the invitation (Skt.: *nimantraṇa*) of the gods and goddesses in the temple sanctuary, the announcement of the festival in the town and the secret fire sacrifice in front of the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī take place.

#### ***In the morning***

On this day, in the morning, a pair of baskets containing items for worship, *kalah pūjā*, are carried to the temple sanctuary from the house of the most senior among the Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu. One of the two *kalah pūjā* comes from a particular Shrestha family called Pañyāju.<sup>2</sup> This family is also called *pūjā bhāri*, signifying one who bears the responsibility to organise royal or government worship. The other *kalah pūjā* is prepared in the eldest priest’s house. The *pūjā* items from the Pañyāju’s house are supposed to come from the palace, and be sent to the oldest priest’s house. Then a Vajrācārya priest carries both *pūjā* baskets out from the eldest Vajrācārya priest’s house.

In the temple sanctuary both the Pañyāju and Vajrācārya’s *pūjā* are offered together. First they offer worship in the temple of Hyāumkhvāḥ māju, and then they go to Cibhā or the Yogeśvar Svayambhū temple.<sup>3</sup> The offering made to the Red-faced mother is called ‘*gvay dām tayegu*’, and consists of a shallow earthen pot (*salim*) with ten betel nuts and a one-rupee and a one-paisā coin; such worship must generally be held prior to any big festival (Tuladhar 1979/80). The Vajrācārya priests whose turn it is at that time worship inside the temple. So the baskets with offerings are handed over to the priest on duty. In between, the Pañyāju performs worship with a shallow earthen pot with betel nuts and coins. At the time of offering, the Pañyāju prays for peace during the festival. Then the Pañyāju and the Vajrācārya move up to the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, the yellow-faced mother. There they perform the worship of the Yellow-faced mother together with the Lion and Tiger-faced guardians on the first

floor and the Cibhā dyo on the ground floor, these also being among the processional statues of the festival of Vajrayoginī. At the time of the worship, the Pañyāju has to pray to the Yellow-faced mother for her safe journey to town and back to the temple after the completion of her festival. After the worship they must eat something termed '*cipaṃ thiye*'. They eat sacrificial food (*samaybaji*): meat, ginger, garlic, soybeans and beaten rice at the temple site. When they go back to town, one of the members of Vajrācārya takes *prasād*, mainly flowers and blessing powders (*sinhaṃ*), from the temple to the old palace in the town, nowadays received by the elected head of the VDC. The priest also brings *prasād* to three Joṣī families and three Shrestha families in Sankhu, because they are considered to represent the nobles of the town.<sup>4</sup>

### ***Announcement of the festival in the town***

In the late afternoon, the invitation announcement begins in the town. It begins in the Iṃlā quarter, where the old palace (*lāyku*) of the kingdom of Sankhu was once situated (see Map 4). As we know, the palace area in the centre of the town is an important place. All the important ritual activities are linked to the palace in one way or other. The procession of Vajrayoginī as the most important festival of the town receives royal patronage, including the invitation, and many other activities of the festival are linked to the palace, as will become clearer later. The task of invitation is given to an elder from the butcher (Nāy) caste. In the past, when he used to go around the town, two traditional soldiers called Mahāṃ used to guard him, one on his right and the other on his left, during the announcement in each quarter.

The Newar Mahāṃ's sons from Sankhu discontinued their duties after their fathers' demise because they did not like the duties of a Mahāṃ; so, at present, one Dipbahadur Chetri from the Parvate community performs this task, and he is assisted by another Newar Mahāṃ. When the Nāy walks around the town for the announcement, some other butchers accompany him with two *nāykhim*, the butcher's music: one pair of cymbals and a drum.<sup>5</sup> In the past, no one followed him, but in the last few years many people have started to follow him, mainly from the quarter where the deities have been kept during that year's festival. These people join the ceremony voluntarily to give it more lustre.

The elder butcher is paid about two hundred rupees for this task. In the past, the town head (*dvāre*) responsible for local administrations used to arrange such payments to the butcher and he was also responsible for several other activities that took place during the festival. Now the VDCs

perform such duties and make payments. Anandabhadur Shrestha, a former head of the Panchayat (Pradhanpancha), told me that at the beginning of his tenure, the Guthi Corporation used to provide 1,200 Nepalese rupees to the Panchayat to carry out all the ritual activities of the festival. Later, he succeeded in receiving six thousands rupees. He told me that he managed to increase the amount to 15,000 rupees before he retired from his post as Pradhānpanca in 1992.<sup>6</sup>

Just before the beginning of the announcement, the elder Nāy washes his hands and offers a few coins to the Gaṇeśa shrine, which is at the centre of the Iṃlātol quarter facing south. Then his team walks around the temple of Gaṇeśa. Stopping behind the temple and folding his hands, he faces north toward the forest where the Vajrayoginī temple is situated and prays to Vajrayoginī. Then he starts his first announcement, known as '*dyo bvanegu*', the invitation to gods and goddesses. He reminds the people of Sankhu of the prohibitions which are in force during the festival. In each quarter he repeats the same speech, which can be translated as follows:

“O! Traders, noble and gentlemen of Iṃlā of so and so quarter: for eight days preceding the festival till eight days after the festival no leather shoes may be worn, no umbrellas may be used, riding horses or riding elephants is not allowed, nobody is allowed to use palanquins, and money lenders are not allowed to ask money back from their debtors. If anybody disobeys this proclamation, he or she will suffer a curse from the mother goddess Vajrayoginī.”

As the protective goddess of Sankhu, Vajrayoginī is the most revered goddess for the people of Sankhu. To wear leather shoes, use umbrellas, to ride horses, elephants or palanquins is considered a sign of opulent show. The prohibition of those things during the festival means paying respect to the goddess Vajrayoginī and her festival. In the past, the prohibition of leather shoes used to create many disputes each year, because many outsiders who come to Sankhu during the festival knowingly or unknowingly used to ignore the rule and this caused conflicts, but nowadays even local people do not strictly observe this rule.

After Iṃlā quarter the announcement is made in Pukhulāchi, Dhoṃlā, Sālkhā, Calākhu, Dugāhiti, Suntol, Sāṃgā, Kvātha, Vasimākva and Ipātol, in that order. Sāṃgā, Kvātha and Vasimākva are not the main quarters like the other eight, but they are important for this festival. The route followed by the announcer is also the ceremonial route followed by Vajrayoginī on the main day of the procession (*Mū jātrā*) in the town. The announcement ends when the team arrives back in the Iṃlā quarter. From there they disperse and go back to their own homes.

### *Secret fire sacrifice in front of the temple of Vajrayoginī*

At about dusk, a secret fire sacrifice must be performed in front of the temple of Vajrayoginī. The five most senior (*thakāli*) Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu carry out this task and are helped by junior priests. It must be done in secret as no other members of the Vajrācārya, who have not undergone priestly initiation (*dīkṣā*), are allowed to observe it. The general public is not allowed to observe the sacrifice either. However, in both 1996 and 1997, I was able to approach very close to the sacrificial site. At about seven in the evening, before the priests began the fire sacrifice, they tried to close the temple area for all outsiders. They closed the main entrance to the temple compound, and some of the priests were asked to stand guard to prevent any outsiders from entering the temple complex. They tried to chase us out too, but we managed to persuade them to allow us to stay inside. I was not allowed to stay in the rest place together with the priests where the fire sacrifice was being carried out, but I was allowed to stand a few metres away from them and could watch their activities. However, as the priests were very reluctant to let me see all their activities in detail, I could not get any satisfactory explanation of their secrecy. One Vajrācārya told me that because the fire sacrifice is performed according to tantric rituals, which includes meat, secret mantras and devotional songs (*caryā*), they have to keep it secret.<sup>7</sup>

In front of the pagoda temple there is a *phalcā*, where every morning religious people from Sankhu perform *bhajan*. Inside the resting place straight in front of the temple gate, the Vajrācārya priests make a fire pit using unbaked bricks, instead of using the permanent fire pit, which is just in front of the temple. They said that this is to keep the fire sacrifice a secret. As we know, the Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu are divided into five main groups (*kavaḥ*), and the descendants of each group have received the hereditary right to choose their eldest as *thakāli*. These five most senior Vajrācārya priests are responsible for carrying out major ritual activities related to Vajrayoginī. In principle, all the five *thakalis* had to be present at the fire sacrifice, but four *thakalis* were not present, and were represented by their sons. Among them was, of course, the eldest Vajrācārya priest (*mū thakāli*), as is necessary on such occasions. He is called *mūlācārya*, main priest, and his assistant is called *upādhyāy*, assistant priest. One of the priests of Sankhu has to play the role of the *yajamāna*, the lord of sacrifice. Each year one family of Vajrācārya in Sankhu gets a turn to become *yajamāna*. That family has to arrange all the necessary items for the sacrifice. Thirty-two ingredients, which include different varieties of rice, beans, fruits and 108 pieces of the lungs of a buffalo, were used in the fire sacrifice. Since they do not need to sacrifice

any animals, they just buy a piece of buffalo lung from a butcher's shop for the purpose of the fire sacrifice.

The Vajrācārya priests were using a hand-written text, which contains Sanskrit Ślokas and Newar instructions in old Newar scripts. The fire sacrifice they performed is called *śānti svasti homa*, the fire sacrifice for peace and prosperity. The manuscript bears the same title, *śānti svasti homa*, as a manual for the fire sacrifice, but we were not allowed to read the manuscript. As the eldest Vajrācārya told us, the fire sacrifice also serves to inform the three hundred and thirty million gods and goddesses (*tetisa koṭi dya*) about the festival. He said it was also to satisfy all those gods and goddesses, who ultimately bring peace, prosperity and happiness to the world.

After a certain ceremony and worship of Guru Mandala, the fire was lit by the eldest priest. Guru mandala worship is an important ritual performed at the beginning of most Vajrayāna Buddhist ceremonies in Nepal. It is an act of worship of a *mandala* representing Vajrasattva, who is both the *guru* of Vajrācārya priests and an exoteric deity who is a kind of representation of the absolute in Vajrayāna Buddhism.<sup>8</sup> The fire sacrifice was a long detailed one, lasting about two hours. Apparently, the main priest was new, and was not very familiar with the rituals, so one young priest was guiding him in the course of the fire sacrifice. One of the priests was also reciting songs of praise (*ślokas*) from the text, and these were in Sanskrit. After a certain *śloka* the *yajamāna* was instructed to put different ingredients into the fire. As in most other cases, the priests who were reciting the Sanskrit *ślokas*<sup>9</sup> did not have a proper knowledge of Sanskrit; they were also incompetent in singing *caryā*. However, they did their best to do their job.

In the meantime, while the fire sacrifice was taking place, one of the members of the sacrificial team offered worship in the temple. This was with a plate consisting of flowers, wicks, incense, rice grains, beaten rice, red and yellow *ṭikā*, and garlands of thread, which he handed over to the priest in the temple.

As in other instances, a *kalāśa*, i.e., a holy jar with water, is placed in front of the fire, on a brick. It represents the main deity to whom the fire sacrifice is offered, in this case Vajrayoginī. Why the main deity has to be represented in two ways is unclear but the twofold representation is very common. On several occasions, the priests explained to me that it was to draw the deity nearer to witness the ceremony from as close a distance as possible.<sup>10</sup>

It is noticeable that during the fire sacrifice the temple gate was kept open and that the priest of the temple whose turn it was to be guardian



(*pāhlā*) was there. Except for the priest on duty, other priests are generally not supposed to go inside the temple. The priest who had duties in the temple did not participate in the fire sacrifice; while the fire sacrifice was being carried out that evening, he was offering worship (*ārati*) in the temple as usual.

As the priests explained, the temple gate was kept open so that Vajrayoginī could see the fire sacrifice. They also told us that the fire sacrifice was performed mainly to give her information about the festival and to gain her divine help in organising the festival without any obstructions. All the five priests had to abstain from food until the fire sacrifice was completed. At the end of the fire sacrifice, the most senior priest (*mūlācārya*) distributed flowers and *ṭikā* to all the other priests. First, he took *ṭikā* and flowers for himself, then gave them to the *yajamāna*, and then to the other priests. He also sprinkled holy water from the *kalaśa* on everybody. From the sacrificial fire they made a soot mark (*mohani*) on an instrument called *homva*, which they put on their forehead as the blessing (*prasād*) at the end of the fire sacrifice. The *prasād* was given to us, too, as we had been watching the fire sacrifice till the end. When the fire sacrifice ended the priests had a meal of *samay baji*, with which they broke their fast. At first they wondered whether to give the *samay baji* to us or not, and later we were given the food symbolically.

### **Reception of the royal sword (*jujuyā taravā*) in the town**

Four days after the announcement of the festival, a royal sword representing the reigning king gets a ceremonial welcome in the town. In the past, the sword was brought by a Shrestha family called Maltā, whose traditional duty was also to be a witness in the disputes about the houses in Sankhu as the housing officer (*chembhāri*). They ceased their traditional duties of housing long ago, as Candra Lal the eldest of the Maltā family told me, because the rewards were very little. Though they did stop the task of bringing the sword from Hanumandhoka, the old royal palace of Nepal, they still perform some ritual duties such as the worship of the processional statues during festival from the royal side, and arranging new dresses for the processional statues and other statues in the temple, as these must be changed during the festival. One member from his family still has to accompany the royal sword during the festival. For all these duties, these days they are paid by the VDC. So far the task of bringing the royal sword from the Hanumandhoka palace has been delegated to the new Mahām Dīpbahadur Chetri.

The Mahām has to fetch the royal sword; each year one day before its reception he has to go to Kathmandu, where the old Hanumandhoka palace is situated. There an officer of the Hanumandhoka opens a store from which the Mahām has to pick up the sword. That same day he has to bring the sword straight to Sankhu, but not inside the town. He has to deposit it in a house, which is situated about three hundred metres southwest of the town gate at a place called Masyāmpūtācā. In that house, which belongs to an oil presser's (Mānandhar) family from Sankhu, the sword remains for a night. I was told that the Mānandhar family has no other obligations to fulfil. The *chembhāri*, the eldest of the Maltā family, said that in the past a Mahām had to inform the people of Sankhu as soon as the sword had arrived at that place, and on the same day the sword used to get a reception in the town, but this custom has been discontinued since some years ago.

### *The reception of the sword*

Nowadays, the royal sword usually gets a formal reception at Masyāmpūtācā in the morning. The reception ceremony is open to everybody, but most people come from that quarter of the town where in that year the processional statues are going to be kept during the festival.

The first act in the formal reception of the royal sword is made at Masyāmpūtācā by displaying it to the public. This is the first occasion on which the sword is shown to the public. The second occasion when the sword is displayed is at the same place on the day of its return to the Hanumandhoka palace. For the rest of the festival it remains covered. I shall describe the ceremony as I saw it in 1995.

In the morning when the Mahām brought the royal sword from the house of the Mānandhar and walked to the top of a mound, which is on the right side of the house. Once there was a rest place there, but it collapsed long ago and was never re-erected. Otherwise, the unveiling of the sword would have taken place in that resting place. The person who was going to carry the sword represented the VDC where the processional statues were going to be kept during the festival that year. He followed the Mahām. Then another person from the same quarter with some incense and red powder (*abir*) in his hand went together with them onto the mound. The sword was covered with a special shiny cloth (*tās*). The Mahām held up the sword with its cover and then announced:

“O! people of Sankhu, by the order of the king, now, I shall reveal the sword”.

He took out the sword from its cloth cover, and then he drew it from its sheath. He showed it to the public who were gathered there to see the unveiling of the sword. More than fifty people gathered there to receive the sword. Most of them had nothing to do but to watch the event silently, but some of them were cracking jokes among themselves.

The sword was about two feet long, and its handle was made of gold. Some in the audience said that it was a good sign to have a sword with a golden handle. They said that a handle of gold was more auspicious than a handle of silver or steel. One said it depends on the luck of the person's fate who carries it, because it has to be picked up from a storeroom in the Hanumandhoka, where hundreds of swords are stored. However, the Mahām who brought it from the Hanumandhoka refuted such beliefs. He said that in the store only four or five swords were kept for similar purposes, and that they were all similar.

After the show, the Mahām put back the sword into its sheath and wrapped it in its cloth bag. Then he immediately handed it over to the person who was going to carry it that year. That year was the turn of Suntol quarter, so the sword carrier was selected by the Suntol VDC administration. The man with incense and *abir* sprayed some red powder over the covered sword and some powder on the heads and shoulders of the carrier, and the Mahām. Then he burned the incense he had brought along.

During the ceremony, one group of Jogi, the Newar caste whose occupation is to play music at different festivals, was playing their music. Their instruments include a short curved horn (*mvahālīm*), four cornets (*kanāth*), a two-headed drum (*dhvalak*), and a pair of small cymbals (*chusyā*). They were playing their music during the reception ceremony. The Jogi music group has to accompany the sword carrier playing their music many times during the festival.

During the ceremony due respect was given to the sword rather than to the sword carrier, because the sword represents the reigning king. The sword carrier is not considered a representative of the king himself, but can be anybody from the town selected by the VDC administration. At the time of Malla rule (13th to 18th century), the Malla kings themselves used to join the festival. When the kings themselves were unable to join the festival only then a sword represented them. The SSS tells that in 1750 (NS 870) the last Malla king of Kathmandu Jayprakash Malla could not join the Vajrayoginī festival and was represented by his sword:

On 1 Caitra Kṛṣṇa (1750) all the people from Sako went to Guheśvarī to pay their respects to Sri 2 Jayprakasa. ... In this year the king did not come to the procession of Sri 3 Vajrayoginī, nor did he send a substitute. Only a

sword was brought and by carrying the sword the procession proceeded (folio; 32b).

The MMC, which contains ritual instructions for carrying out the procession, says nothing about the royal sword. Whether the Shah rulers (the present ruling dynasty of Nepal), the successors of the Mallas, ever came to the Vajrayoginī festival is not known with certainty, but the tradition of bringing the king's sword has become a part of Vajrayoginī festival. Nowadays, people in Sankhu believe that this replacement is a longstanding tradition; no king can visit the Vajrayoginī temple or Sankhu without bringing misfortune upon himself and his reign. Why and since when people came to believe this myth is not known. There is no historical evidence to explain this belief, but there are several notes to be found in the MMC about the visit of kings to Sankhu and the Vajrayoginī. However, it appeared that all the Shah kings have maintained the tradition of not visiting the temple.

After the ceremony, the sword carrier walked towards the town holding the sword in his left hand, followed by all those gathered there. The Jogi musical group went ahead, playing their music, then the sword carrier, with other people walking behind him. The Mahām was walking with him as a guard, and holding his right hand another person (a friend of the sword carrier) was walking with him. Throwing some coins with his right hand to the Bhagavatī shrine, a few steps south of the gate, the sword carrier showed his respects towards the goddess. They entered the town through the southwestern gate, the Bhaudhvākā, and walked in a northerly direction.

Via the Vasimākva and Ipātol quarters they arrived at Iṃlātol, which is almost in the middle of the western half of the town, where once the palace (*lāyku*) was situated and where now stand the VDC buildings of Pukhulāchi, milk chilling centre, and a carpet factory. The VDC building faces west and behind it is a courtyard where the royal platform (*juju dabū*) is situated. The sword carrier and other people walked inside the courtyard through the main gate, which faces west, while the music group took their seats with their musical instruments at a rest place (*phalcā*) in front of the gate. The rest place faces north. During the festival, each time when the sword is carried from its home, it is carried to the Iṃlā quarter before it is carried to this rest place and is used as the royal seat for the sword. Therefore, it is also known as the royal rest place (*lāyku phalcā*).

***The reception of the sword at the palace gate***

As the procession arrived at the courtyard gate the Brahmin priest performed the act of welcome of the sword. The sword carrier stood in front of the gate opposite the Brahmin, while on both sides of him many people were standing to watch the ceremony. Brass pitchers filled with water were put on the right and left corners of the gate. The sword carrier dropped a few coins into the pitchers as soon as he came near them. The Brahmin priest carried a plate (*pūjābhu*) containing items for worship: rice grains, red and yellow powder, popped-rice (*tāy*), beaten rice, flowers, fruits, sweet-breads, incense, wicks and a white cotton thread with a tiny piece of red cloth (*jajamkā*). He also had a *sukundā*, a wick lamp used in rituals and a pot of clean water (*nīlah*). The sword carrier's wife prepared the *pūjā* plate, and she brought it to the site.



Plate 50 The royal sword representing the reigning king during the festival of Vajrayoginī (April 1995).

Reciting a few *ślokās*,<sup>11</sup> the priest first sprinkled some water over the sword, the sword carrier, and other people surrounding him, then started to

offer some red and yellow powder, cotton thread, flowers, beaten rice, fruits, sweet breads and burning wicks and incense to the sword and the sword carrier. He also threw some rice grains over the sword, and then instructed the sword carrier to enter the courtyard of the palace. Many people also walked with him inside the courtyard while the Jogi musicians remained outside playing their music.

### ***Receiving the sword on the royal platform***

At the centre of the courtyard stands the traditional platform, known as the king's platform as well as god's platform. It is square in shape. Its height is about one metre, and the length and breadth are about three metres. It is made of bricks and the surface is plastered with cement. In 1968 it was reconstructed when the present building of Pukhulāchi was being built. It is forbidden for anybody to step on or to sit down on this platform.

The sword carrier with his sword stepped onto the platform, and sat down on a round mat (*cakati*), facing the north. He was allowed to sit because he was with the royal sword, although that special treatment was being given to the royal sword rather than to the sword carrier. The sword again received similar worship by the same Brahmin. First, the Brahmin sprinkled water on all people who were around, and then on the sword. This time the Brahmin made a red blessing mark (*sagam*) with rice grains, popped rice, red powder, and yoghurt on a bowl made of leaves (*bvatā*): first on his own forehead, then on the covered sword. He also put a mark on the forehead of the sword carrier and on the forehead of the Mahām who was standing below the platform at the side of the sword carrier. The Brahmin continued to give the blessing marks to a few more people, and then gave the container to someone among them, asking the other people to serve themselves. Those who were there took the blessing mark themselves. This was the end of the ceremony inside the courtyard. The sword carrier stepped down from the platform, and took the sword around the platform in a clockwise direction and went out by the same gate through which he had entered.

### ***Walking through the town***

Most of the people who had followed the sword carrier also accompanied him on his way to his home. The Jogi music group also accompanied him by playing music, but the Brahmin priest went his own way after the ceremony.

That year, the sword carrier was from the Suntol quarter, at the southern end of the eastern part of the town. So he had to walk clockwise around the town to reach his house, by way of Pukhulāchi, Dhomlā, Sālkhā, Calākhū and Dugāhiti quarters. He had to take the sword clockwise around every shrine he passed on his way home.

Many people in his route offered lights and rice grains to the sword as they saw it passing by. The sword carrier had to stop when he saw clothes or mats hanging over the street, and the Mahām had to shout to the house owners to remove those things from their windows, so that the sword carrier could walk on. As was explained, the sword represents the king, hence cannot pass houses from where any clothes or mats are hanging. Similarly, no gods or goddesses can pass below hanging clothes during their procession in town. People believe that hanging clothes over the streets where gods or kings have to pass dishonours them. So it was apparent that the sword representing the king received treatment equal to that of a god.

### ***Reception at the entrance of the sword carrier's house***

When the sword carrier arrived in front of his house the sword carrier dropped some coins into each pitcher placed at both corners of the gate. This time, the wife of the sword carrier came down with a *pūjā-plate* to worship the sword before he enters the house. The *pūjā-plate* contained similar ingredients as at the courtyard gate. She offered the items of worship to the sword in a similar way as the Brahmin priest did at the palace gate, but she was not reciting any mantras. The Mahām guard collected the food and coins she offered. As the *pūjā* ended, the sword carrier stepped inside his house. Some of his family members, who were watching the ceremony from above, showered rice grains from the windows on him and the sword, before he entered his home.

He carried the sword up to the second floor of his house, where he opened a storeroom and put it inside a cupboard. As he told me, he had to take care of the sword as long as it remained with him during the festival. After the sword has entered the carrier's house, it can only be brought out four days later, when the processional statues are brought down to the town. After this, the others went on their ways; also the Jogi music group stopped music and left.

### *The significance of the royal sword*

Treating the sword with great honour as if it were the king himself or a god makes it clear that the representation of royalty during the festival is highly valued. It clearly indicates that royalty plays a vital role during the procession of Vajrayoginī. In the past, the king himself had to be present to please the goddess, so that the goddess could bless him for the continuation of his rule. Because of the godly treatment of the royal sword, confusion is not unlikely about the power of these two institutions. Whether the procession of Vajrayoginī can be carried out if a king happens to die during the festival is another question. As the MMC recorded, it happened once in the past. In 1674 (NS 784), four days before bringing the processional statues of Vajrayoginī down to the town, king Pratap Malla died and his son Nripendra Malla or the new king ordered the procession to be suspended for that year to mourn the king's death. There was debate on whether to carry out the procession or not among the Vajrācārya priests and noblemen of Sankhu. They decided to stop the procession, but not without a proper act of apology (*kṣemā pūjā*) at the temple. As the note says, this was the first time that the procession of Vajrayoginī was not carried out to Sankhu town, and this has never occurred since. This incident shows how royalty overrules the goddess, but a cautious apology was performed to pacify her, as she could otherwise cause more calamities. The MMC tells that in 1680 (NS 800), when the procession of Vajrayoginī arrived in the town, her palanquin fell down, but no proper apology or pacifying fire sacrifice was performed, and this caused king Nripendra Malla's death. These sorts of notes clearly indicate that the power of the goddess is not a subject to be ignored, even by the king. When we look at the history of Nepal, kings were always considered to be an incarnation of one or other god, such as Viṣṇu and Bhairav. The king as a human representation of the god is powerful enough to rule his people, but he is not capable of escaping from the consequences caused by his disobedience to gods. As the MM tells, the procession of the goddess is not only an occasion for renewing his power, but also for providing the king with a chance to see her. Hence it was important for the king to present himself on this occasion for the sake of the re-enactment of his power in his realm.

The tradition of sending a sword began only during the time of king Jayprakash Malla, who happened to be the last Malla king of Kathmandu. Religious people may assume that the change he brought about might have cost him his throne. The presence of the royal sword throughout the festival in town makes it clear that, even though it is a symbolic representation of the king, its role is still important.



### ***Gvasiṃ hayegu, the bringing of the wood***

The bringing of wood is done two or three days before bringing the processional statues down from the forest temple to the town. Wood can be brought from any forest around the town, but usually brought from the nearest forest, Salamgum, which is situated about five hundred metres southwest of the town. In the early afternoon of the day when the wood is cut, people from the quarter where the processional statues are to be kept that year come together to collect the wood. There is no real organisation for the purpose, but people in that quarter gather spontaneously. The butcher's music (*nāykhim*), and *dhime*, a two-headed large drum with a pair of large cymbals, also joins the group. They cut down some trees to provide sufficient wood to sustain an open-air fire for four days and four nights. They drag these trees tied with ropes from the forest to the town. In the town, the wood is deposited very close to the god's rest house (*dyo satah*), to be burnt on the day of *Mu bijyā*. This fire has a direct link with the eternal fire at the Vajrayoginī temple.

### **Bringing the processional statues down to the town, 'Kvahām bijyā'**

The activities of the festival of Vajrayoginī already start from the day of the announcement, but the people in the town regard the day of bringing down the deities as the first day of the festival. This occurs on the full-moon day of the month of Caulā or Caitra, which is locally known as Sakva punhi or the 'full-moon day of Sankhu.'

### ***Bathing and worship at the temple site***

The activities of the festival start from early morning when the inhabitants of Sankhu visit the temple of Vajrayoginī. Early in the morning, the priests carry out a special annual ritual bathing (*nhavam*)<sup>12</sup> of the Red-faced mother, the Lion-faced and Tiger-faced guardians in the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī, the Yellow-faced mother, the Lion-faced and Tiger-faced processional statues. In this task, other priests who have received their ritual initiation (*dīkṣā*) assist the priest whose turn it is to be on duty in the temple. In this sequence, no bathing is performed for the Cibhā in the temple (Jogeśvara) and the processional statue of the Cibhā, but no satisfactory reasons could be found to this omission. However, both these statues receive the regular daily bathing. The bathing is done symbolically

by the priests' sprinkling water on all the statues. The household of every Vajrācārya priest must bring their *kalaḥ pūjā* to the temple on this day.

Special worship in the temple is done by those people who belong to certain *guthi*, and who have to perform certain duties during the festival. Many associations also offer an animal sacrifice at the Mahākāla shrine, situated about two hundred metres below the temple of Vajrayoginī. Mahākāla is known as the guardian deity of the area (*kṣetrapāl*). Several cremation associations (*sī Guthi*) bring their animal sacrifices to Mahākāla once a year, when they observe their annual feasts. As these sacrifices are not allowed within the temple of Vajrayoginī itself, people bring them to Mahākāla, but they are meant for Vajrayoginī. When sacrifices are carried out at the Mahākāla shrine, the Vajrācārya priests consecrate the animals before they are sacrificed. Besides these acts of worship and sacrifice, the association of the Mānandhar in Sankhu performs their *dāphā* music<sup>13</sup> in an open rest place (*phalcā*) in front of the Mahākāla shrine on the same morning. They also sacrifice a goat to Mahākāla.

That same morning two butchers go round the town with their *nāykhim* music, thereby informing the people about the procession of the deities. This is called "*nāykhim cvayekegu*", or to alert the people about coming of the processional statues down to the town. In the afternoon the *nāykhim* again goes round the town one or two more times. They just walk with their music; no verbal announcement is necessary, but the people in the town understand the significance of the music. Traditionally, the butchers are responsible to convey royal decrees to people by making a round of the town with their music.

The local VDC whose turn it is to organise the festival that year has to sacrifice a goat to Gaṇeśa in the Imlā quarter on the full-moon day. In the sequence of any worship Gaṇeśa comes first. As a Hindu myth says, he received a blessing from his parents Śiva and Pārvaṭī that without first worshipping him no one can achieve rewards from other deities. As it is situated in front of the old palace, it is considered to be the Gaṇeśa of the royal house. On this occasion, the VDC has to provide a feast for those people who perform certain duties during the festival. These include the Chembhāri, who accompanies the sword carrier and worships on behalf of the king, the Mahām, the Jośī, the sword carrier, the butchers, the Jogi musicians and those who help in organising things for the festival. In the manner of *sīkāḥbhvay*, the head of the sacrificed goat is divided into eight parts and distributed in the following order:

- the right eye is given to the Yellow-faced mother (collected by the Vajrācārya priest)
- the left eye is given to the sword carrier

- the right ear is given to the Mahām
- the left ear is given to the Chembhāri
- the nose is given to the Vajrācārya priest
- the right jaw is given to the VDC head
- the left jaw is given to an elder of the house where the food is prepared, and
- the tongue is given to the Joṣī priest.

### ***Arrangement of the ornaments***

Most ornaments that are worn by the Yellow-faced mother and the Lion-faced and Tiger-faced guardians during the festival are brought out of the temple of Hyāuṃkhvāḥ māju. As soon as they are brought out of the temple, they are washed and cleaned by the Vajrācārya priests. In the afternoon, in front of the temple, the counting of the ornaments of the deities takes place. Together with the members of the ornament association (*tisā guthi*), local VDC leaders, police, and other religious people carry out the counting of the ornaments. Most ornaments worn by the Yellow-faced mother (Mhāsukhvāḥ māju) are of silver, gold, and there are other varieties of ornaments, such as a silver serpent and a crown with silver leaves and jewels attached to it. Similarly, the ornaments for the Lion-faced and Tiger-faced guardians are also counted. With few exceptions, all of them belong to the Red-faced mother. The Mahām is responsible to decorate the deities with the ornaments, but many other local people help to carry out this job. It is done as soon as the statues are placed on their respective palanquins. Similarly, the Mahām has to take care of all those ornaments during the procession and the priests on duty are also responsible for looking after the ornaments. Once the processional statues are placed inside the god's rest house, the priests, who are on duty, bear the responsibility for the ornaments and the statues.

### ***Bringing the statues out of the temple***

In the past, the processional statues are brought out of the temple in the evening, but they are brought out in the early afternoon these days. In the case of an eclipse of the moon, all the activities must take place before the moon appears in the sky, as happened in the year 1995 and 1996. In those years, because of lunar eclipses the processional statues were brought down from the temple to the town before dusk. Otherwise, bringing all the processional statues down from the temple to the town is usually completed only the next morning, or even the next afternoon. Generally

people believe that an eclipse is inauspicious, so no rituals or worship should be carried out during eclipses. They believe that the *rāhu*, a demon, seizes the sun and the moon, and thus causes eclipses. During the eclipses, it is necessary to give away clothes, salt, grains, money as gifts (*dāna*) to Dyolā, as this untouchable caste is believed to represent the *rāhu* in human form. This helps to set the sun or moon free from the eclipse and the people obtain merit.

Hundreds of people gather in the temple complex at the time of bringing the processional statues out of the temple to their palanquins. Several musical bands, i.e. *nāykhim*, *dhime* and *dhā* also add lustre to the procession. Many come with). Though the *nāykhim* belongs to the butchers, a low caste group in Newar society, it can be played by anybody during the festivals. Similarly the *dhime* music is identified with the farmers' caste, the Jyāpu, but during all festivals everybody can play the *dhime*. Mānandhar, the oil pressers, and Vajrācārya, the priest castes, present *dhā* music but others also play them.<sup>14</sup> In a way, caste distinctions are relaxed during the time of the festival, even for the Po, the lowest caste in Sankhu, who are not discriminated against during the festival in the present day.

As Sānu Dyolā, the eldest Dyolā in Sankhu told me, they used to participate in the festival with their flutes and drums, but they were not allowed to carry the palanquins on their shoulders in the past. These days, people do not care if someone from the Dyolā caste carries the palanquin. People also sing songs of praise to Vajrayoginī; many come with a traditional torch (*cilākha*) in their hands, and this is lit with cooking-oil. In the old days, the local *dvāre* obliged the people of Sankhu to participate in the procession of Vajrayoginī. At least one male from each household had to join the procession. With the change in the times and political system no such obligatory rules are in force anymore. However, in Sankhu the VDCs take care in every possible way to run the festival smoothly, because they are the elected representatives of the people at the local levels. The involvement of the elected heads of the VDC makes it clear that the politicians also support the festival with keen interest.

The Mahām has to say "By the order of the King" to lift the processional statues from their places; only then can they be brought out. As soon as the lifting of the processional statues from the temple begins, the *nāykhim* play the *bārādāyegu* tune.<sup>15</sup> It continues at the time of the lifting of statues, and stops as soon as they are rightly placed in their palanquins. The presence of Nāy (Butcher) musicians is essential at the time of this transfer. Because the images are covered with shrouds and also because the function of the Nāy is to play special music, most Sankhu

people think that the *nāykhim* played on this occasion is funeral music (*sībājā*). The Nāy leader, however, informed me that it is in fact a special festival music, and only resembles funeral music for musically ignorant people. This mode of music is distinct from other festival music, and is not very common. Besides this, at the time of transfer of Vajrayoginī the *bārādāyegu* mode is played only when a team of people returns from a temple with the *nāykhim* music. At the time of lifting and transferring the statues to palanquins, all the bells in the temple complex are tolled while the music is being playing. At other times in the festival, *caltibājā* is played to provide a gay mood.

When the statue of the Yellow-faced mother is carried from the temple to her palanquin, her face and the front part of her body are covered with a cloth. The pinnacle of the Cibhā is also covered with a piece of cloth at the time of transferring it from the temple to its palanquin, while the two small statues of the Lion-faced and Tiger-faced guardians are not covered during their transfer. From the temple to the palanquins people carry them with their bare hands or on their shoulders. The tolling of the bells stops as soon as the statues have been installed in their palanquins. To fasten them in the palanquins they are bound tightly with jute ropes.

### *The procession of palanquins*

About 150 metres below, to the southwest of the temple of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, the palanquins are made ready for the festival. During the rest of the year, the main parts of the palanquins are kept on the ground floor of a rest house in front of the temple of the Yellow-faced mother. The main parts of the two biggest palanquins are about three by three metres. These two belong to the Cibhā and the Yellow-faced mother. Two other small palanquins belonging to the Lion-faced and Tiger-faced guardians are about two by two metres and have a similar shape. Each palanquin is put on a wooden frame with two long wooden beams, which rest on four wooden struts (legs) about one or one and a half metres high. Crossing those two heavy wooden beams, three bamboo poles are attached at the front and three at the rear side of the two biggest palanquins. Those bamboo poles are meant to carry the palanquins on the shoulders of the people in the procession.

The two small palanquins have only two bamboo poles attached to them, one at their front and another at their back, crossing the two long beams. Such small palanquins are not heavy and are always carried by teenaged boys. But the big palanquins are very heavy, so the adult people carry them. The Sankhu people carry them down to town. In the past, the

palanquins had to be made ready by an association called '*kha guthi*', but nowadays a contractor (*thekedār*) does this, who gets payments from the government Guthi Corporation (Guthi Samsthān).<sup>16</sup> As some old people remember, in the past the palanquins were in the shape of a pagoda-style temple with a roof on their top, but the shape was changed long ago. Nowadays, there are no longer roofs on the top of the palanquins.

### ***The worship of the deities on the palanquins***

The fixing and binding of the statues on the palanquins takes more than an hour. At the same time, the decoration of the deities with the ornaments is done under the supervision of the Mahām and the Vajrācārya priests. On this day, the Yellow-faced mother gets decorated with a crown on her head made of gold and silver leaves, and some of these leaves consist of precious jewels, which remain on her head till the end of the festival. During the rest of the year, the crown remains locked in a box that is kept in the eldest priest's home. In the mean time, two groups belonging to the Svām *guthi*, the flower association, come to offer their worship.<sup>17</sup> Each group offers flowers, garlands, red and yellow powder, fruits and *samay baji* to all the four deities. They offer flags to the Yellow-faced mother and to Cibhā, but not to Simhīnī and Byāghrinī. The flags are painted with a red-coloured half moon on a piece of white cloth, and each is attached to a reed. Besides the worship by the Svām *guthi*, the members of the Vajrācārya priests' *guthi* also worship all the deities with food and *pūjā* items, but they do not offer any flags.

### ***Carrying the palanquins down to the town***

After the statues are fixed on the palanquins they are carried down to the town. First, usually children between twelve and fifteen carry away the small palanquins of Simhīnī and Byāghrinī. The palanquins of the Yellow-faced mother and the Cibhā need real strength to move them; it takes the joint effort of fifty people to carry them. The road from the temple site to the town is not smooth; people have to climb down uneven stone steps. If there are enough people to carry the palanquins and if they do not take long breaks on the way, it takes about four to five hours to reach the town. In order to gather enough people, the VDC is responsible every year to arrange drinks and refreshments. About halfway down, the carriers are served with local beer and snacks.

As soon as the palanquins arrive at the place called Devācā, the Vajrācārya priests carry out the opening of the eyes (*dṛṣṭi kamkegu*) of the

deities. This is a ceremony of placing eyes over the existing ones. Thin silver eyes are attached over the eyes of all the processional statues on this occasion. During the major worship of any deity the *dṛṣṭi kamkegu* is an essential act. As a Vajrācārya priest told me, it is to allow the deities to see the event.

When the palanquins arrive inside the town gate of Sankhu, all the deities get special worship from the Chembhāri. The sword carrier joins him for the worship. He offers one coconut with shell, fruits, sweets, beaten rice, red and yellow powder, and flowers to the Yellow-faced mother. He also offers those items to the Cibhādyo, but to the Lion-faced and Tiger-faced guardians coconuts are not offered. The royal sword carrier with the sword in his hand also bows down to all the deities. The offering of Chembhāri and the worship by the sword carrier are considered to be on behalf of the reigning king. In the past, the Pañyāju used to do the worship, but he has stopped this task since 1980. The place of entry into town is the Svāmlā subquarter.

The two palanquins belonging to Simhinī and Byāghrinī are carried away on the palanquins without any Vajrācārya priests accompanying them, but the Vajrācārya priests guard the two other palanquins, one belonging to the Yellow-faced mother and the other belonging to the Cibhā. Four priests take their place on the palanquin of the Yellow-faced mother and two priests on that of the Cibhā. The priests wear a crown (*matu*) with the paintings of the five Buddhas, namely: Vairocana, Akṣobhya, Amitābha, Amoghasiddhi and Ratnasambhava. They have to embark on the palanquins before these cross a point at the Svāmlā subquarter, which is indicated by a stone *mandala* on the ground, and a hanging canopy above the mandala. When the palanquins arrive close to this point, the palanquin carriers try to carry the palanquins away quickly so as not to let the priests ride on them. If this happens, the priests feel embarrassed. In 1996, lest they face such an embarrassing situation, the priests climbed on the palanquins before the point they had to, and this action resulted in long arguments between the priests and the palanquin carriers. In the end, the palanquins had to be carried on, as the priests managed to convince the people that once they had taken their places in the palanquin they could not step down from it before they arrived in the quarter where the god's rest house (*dyo sataḥ*) was situated. For the sake of fun, youngsters try to humiliate the Vajrācārya priests, but not everybody takes it seriously.



Plate 51 Thousands of people flock to Sankhu to watch the procession (April 1995).

As the palanquins enter the town, the crowds of people grow bigger and bigger. The sword carrier with the royal sword in his hand goes ahead of the procession. The Jogi musicians accompany him. Along the way to the *dyo satah*, people offer rice grains, puffed rice, wicks and pancakes to the deities from their windows. In return, the priests on the palanquins throw flowers and pancakes towards the windows as blessings from the deities. Throwing pancakes is also done for amusement.

### ***Transferring the statues from the palanquins to the god's rest house***

In front of the god's rest house, the palanquins are halted so that the statues can be untied and lifted out. Anybody can do this task, but those who are experienced take the initiative. Then the statues are transferred from the palanquins to the god's rest house. When the statues have been transferred, the people eagerly touch the statues in a gesture of worship. The god's rest houses in Dhomlā and Calākhū quarter face south, while the god's rest house in Suntol faces north, and that of Pukhulāchi faces east. Therefore there is no rule as to the direction in which the statues should face once they are in town, but the ritual manual written in the



MMC gives instructions to place the Cibhā on the right of the Yellow faced-mother.



Plate 52 Dāphā musicians singing songs at the quarter where the procession statues are kept (April 1995).

Once they are placed inside the god's rest house, the priests whose turn it is during the festival guard them. The people of Sankhu begin to crowd toward the god's rest house as soon as the statues are placed there. Especially in the evening and in the morning, they go to worship: in the evening with wicks and rice grains where as in the morning with items such as rice grains, puffed rice, red and yellow powder, flowers, fruits, sweet meats, beaten rice and coins. They are offered vegetarian food by the general public during the festival, but the priests have to offer them cooked rice with a variety of beans and lentils, as well as dried fish three times a day.

### **Sunyakā: a day of inactivity**

Pāru, the day after the full-moon, is called Sunyakā, or the day of inactivity. On this day the people in Sankhu make themselves ready to celebrate the festival by smearing red clay and cow dung on the floors of their houses. They also wash their clothes and take a bath to clean

themselves. As far as possible family members who are out of town come back home to celebrate the festival. From this day onwards till the last day of the festival, several groups of devotional singers (*bhajan* and *dāphā*) go to play music and sing devotional songs in front of the god's rest house every evening, as do the Jogi musicians.

### ***Ritual bathing of the deities***

Once the processional statues have been installed in the god's rest house, the bathing of the deities takes place every day early in the morning. For this purpose, the Vajrācārya priests have to collect water from a place called Takkihvālā on the banks of Śālinadī River.

To collect the water, at least four Vajrācārya priests belonging to three families have to gather early in the morning. They go to the river playing drum and cymbals, one of them carrying a wicker tray (*dhaki*) containing items of worship and a small silver jar (*kalaśa*), and two of them play the *dhā* music. They come out from Mulam, the Vajrācārya's quarter, and go to the river via Sālkhā, Calākhū and Dhalamko quarters. The Dhalamko quarter and its gate are the main route to the Śālinadī river.

As they approach the riverbank, one of the priests goes down to the river. First he takes a bath in the river, and then he collects water in the jar. Returning to the riverbank, he places the jar on a stone for its sanctification. The same priest sanctifies the jar by offerings rice grains, flowers, beaten rice, *jajamkā*, incense and wicks. Then the jar is covered with a red cloth on its top and is carried by the same priest in his hands. The *dhā* music players and other Vajrācārya priests go ahead of him. Nobody may touch him as he walks towards the god's rest house with the water jar in his hands.

As soon as they approach the god's rest house, the gate of the rest house is closed to the general public. The priest with the water jar in his hands goes inside the rest house, and sprinkles water on all the four statues. He pours most of the water on the processional statue of Cibhā, because it is a gilded statue, while he sprinkles only a little water on the other statues so as not to wet their clothes and bodies. At the time of bathing, other Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu who have received *dīkṣā* also attend the ceremony and sing devotional songs (*caryā*). The bathing and singing of songs continue for more than half an hour. After the bathing, the priests come out of the god's rest house and make a round of the local Gaṇeśa temple. They continue singing for some more time. The ordinary people are allowed to go inside for their worship before and after the bathing ceremony. After the bathing ceremony the priests leave for their

homes. People from every household in Sankhu come to pay their respects to the deities.

### ***Offering the food (bhog chāyegu)***

In the late morning, the five eldest priests have to prepare a feast of cooked rice for the other Vajrācārya priests. In the past, all the male members of the Vajrācāryas in Sankhu used to be present for this feast, but nowadays only a few attend it. When they cook food for the priests, they have to set a portion apart for the deities. At about noon, the first offering of food (*bhog chāyegu*) is made to the deities in the rest house. This is done by one of the elder (*thakāli*) Vajrācārya priests each day during the festival. In principle, the food must contain eighty-four ingredients (*caurāsi byañjan*).<sup>18</sup> The cooking is done in the secret god's house (*āgaṃchem*) of the Vajrācārya priests, and no outsiders are allowed to see it.

The food to be offered to the deities is carried on a plate made of bamboo. When the priest comes out of the *āgaṃchem* with the plate containing food to be offered to the deities, another priest has to walk ahead of him in order to prevent him being touched by bystanders, dogs or any other animals on his way while going to the rest house. He cannot speak on the way to the god's rest house.

He does not enter the god's rest house, but offers the food by throwing a little of each item from the plate to all the deities inside while standing outside the gate. The rest of the food he discards at the crossroads (*chvāsah*)<sup>19</sup> in front of the god's rest house. Then he washes the plate at a public tap near the god's rest house. After washing the plate he also washes his hands and feet.

Food is offered to the deities three times daily in the same manner. The second time is in the afternoon, and the third time is at about dusk. In the past, the Tusinhāy Shrestha family in Sankhu was supposed to offer food. Since they have discontinued the task, the Vajrācārya priests have taken over the task of feeding the deities.

### ***Syākvatyākva and Nakhaḥ: a day of sacrifices and feasts***

Nakhaḥ falls on the day of Caulāgā Tṛtiyā, the third day of the dark half of the month of Caitra. On this day, people in Sankhu have to prepare festive food in their homes. Those who can afford it bring animal sacrifices to Mahākāla, to a local Gaṇeśa or to other deities. Although the day is called Syākotyāko (the more you kill the more you gain) or the day of sacrifice, no sacrifice is offered to the processional statues, because they are

supposed not to eat meat. But every home in Sankhu must prepare a feast, which necessarily includes meat. This day nobody cooks rice at home. They eat beaten rice with other ingredients as the main festive food (*bhvay*).

In the morning, people eat *samay baji* and in the evening the main feast. Every household in Sankhu also makes different kinds of drinks for the feast. A special liquor of the season is red beer (*hyāumthvam*). Those who sacrifice animals have to eat *sikāhbhvay*. The *nakhaḥ* feast is usually eaten with family members, married sisters and daughters and their husbands, but other relatives and friends are also invited.

In Newar society, to observe a feast means not to eat boiled rice on that day, especially during the large local festivals like the festival of Vajrayoginī, and at any other national festivals such as Mohanī or Svanti people also do not eat boiled rice. Traditionally, cooked rice can be shared only among family members, relatives and people of the same caste. No one accepts boiled rice from the kitchen of any caste considered below his or her own. In Newar houses, boiling rice makes the whole household polluted (*cipa*), so it is essential to keep one's household unpolluted (*nipa*) during the festivals. Beaten rice is considered purer than boiled rice, so it is most commonly eaten in any Newar feast, and can be shared among all castes except with the Nāy, Jogī and Po, who are considered to be unclean castes. Water and cooked food are not accepted from them.

### ***Mū jātrā*: the main procession of the processional statues around the town**

The preparation of the *Mū jātrā* begins at various levels. A Thekedār (contractor) appointed by the Guthi Corporation has to take care of fixing the palanquins for the procession. He employs some Tāmāṅ people for this purpose. The butchers make a round of the town in the morning with their *nāykhim* to alert the people about the procession. At about noon, the five eldest (*nyāmha thakali*) priests feed a boiled rice feast (*jā bhvay*) to six Vajrācārya priests who will sit on the palanquins during the procession. In the afternoon, the Thekedār has to organise a *Cakra pūjā* performed by Kānphaṭā or Gorakhanāth yogīs.<sup>20</sup> In the past the procession used to take place in the evening and end only in the next day recently it began taking place in the daytime, hence concluding on the same day.

### *Cakra pūjā*

The *Cakra pūjā* takes place in the centre of Sālkhā quarter, which is situated in the northeastern part of the town. At the centre of this quarter is a temple of Nārāyaṇa (Viṣṇu). Next to this temple to its east is an open space where the *pūjā* is performed. For the *cakra pūjā* Kānpaṭā yogīs are invited from Mṛgasthālī, Kathmandu, and they are paid fees (*dakṣiṇā*) of about two hundred rupees per person for their task by the Thekedār. The Thekedār performs the duty of a *yajamān*, the lord of the sacrifice. First, one of the *yogī* smears a portion of ground (about twenty centimetres broad and three metres long in size) with red clay and cow dung to purify the ground. Then holy water is sprinkled and twenty earthen jars containing fermented rice (*pvaka*) are placed on the smeared area. In the process of worship those jars are bound together by a thread joining their necks. The head of the Kānpaṭā yogīs performs the priestly task for the rituals, and he is assisted by a group of other Kānpaṭā yogīs.

The head of the Kānpaṭā yogīs then begins the worship by drawing a *mandala* with rice flour below each earthen jar. He puts red and yellow powder, rice grains, wicks, incense, flowers and food on top of them. He consecrates the animals to be sacrificed, a duck, a goat and a buffalo, by sprinkling water and offering *tikā*, rice grains, flowers to them all. The animals have to give their consent for sacrifice by shivering their bodies. In most cases, the buffalo does not need to shiver, but in 1996 it did. First the throats of the duck and the goat are slit, and their blood sprinkled on all the jars. Lastly the buffalo is beheaded. A butcher used to be employed by the *thekedār* for the sacrificial work, but nowadays a Tāmāṅg is hired more for the job, as he can be hired cheaply. As soon as the sacrifice is finished, untouchable caste people like Dyolā and Kāmī try to grab the earthen jars, but local youngsters do their best to smash and break those jars for fun. In the past, it was the duty of Dyolā and Kāmī to take away the earthen jars as their share of the ceremony and of course to clean up the place. These days they do not have such obligations but do their best to grab them for their own use. The Thekedār takes away the meat of the sacrificed animals. As he told me, he takes a part of the buffalo meat for his family's consumption and sells the rest.

The next day, at about the same time and in the same place, the *cakra pūjā* is performed in a similar manner, together with sacrifice of a buffalo, goat, and duck. The Thekedār gets his expenses from the Guthi Corporation every year. He told me he first pays at his own risk, and later he presents his bill to the Cooperation. Usually he gets some more money than his own expenses, but sometimes it is difficult for him to get back the money he has spent. Depending on the officer of the Guthi Corporation, he

usually received remunerations for his duties. He explained that the officers often harassed him, but he continued the job because he believed that this was his service to the goddess Vajrayoginī and gives him religious merit. He was, however, did not disclose the exact amount he used to get.



Plate 53 The Kānpaṭā yogīs performing *cakra pūjā* (Photo courtesy: Sjoerd Zanen, April 1979).

In the past, on the same days the *cakra pūjās* had to be performed in Cakhumkyaba subquarter also, but that was stopped some 50 years ago. There is a local myth about the *cakra pūjā* in the Sālkhā quarter. Long before Sālkhā also had its turn in receiving the processional statues, but this was stopped. It is said when the processional statues were kept in the Sālkhā quarter, a big epidemic occurred in Sankhu, which killed many people. To pacify the evil spirits an annual *cakra pūjā* began. From that year onwards, the Sālkhā quarter ceased receiving the processional statues and started the *cakra pūjā* instead. Another myth is that the *cakra pūjā* is performed in order to feed the ghosts of those who had committed suicide.<sup>21</sup>

### *The Mū jātrā*

The MM says that on the day of Mu jātrā the goddess Vajrayoginī herself would come down from the temple to give an audience to king

Śaṅkhadeva, the first king of Sankhu. So it is a very important day. As the preparations for the procession begin, the sword carrier carries the royal sword from his home. He goes first to the Lāyku site, where he sits down for a while in the rest place. A torchbearer, the Mahām, Chembhāri, two policemen and the Jogi musicians accompany him. From the Iṃlā quarter they go to the quarter where the processional statues are kept. In the past, the lifting of the statues from the god's rest house begins in the evening, but nowadays it takes place in the early afternoon. On this day not only people from Sankhu but also thousands of outsiders come to watch the procession. As the fixing of the statues in the palanquins goes on, several *dhime*, *nāykhim* and *dhā* musicians start to come together.

People eat and drink in great quantities on this day, and because of this many people are drunk by the time that the palanquin has to be carried. There is ample occasion, however, to have a good fight, and sometimes a serious one, at the cost of a human life (as happened in 1980). Political and other battles are fought out on the occasion. To avoid such fights people in Sankhu decided to carry out the procession in the daytime, which indeed helped in reducing fights in the recent past. The processional statue of Vasundharā from the Vajrācārya's *āgamchem* joins the procession. She is considered the mother-in-law of the Yellow-faced mother and mother of the Cibhā, and it is supposed that she comes to call on the deities to return to their forest resort. Her palanquin is the smallest one, and is carried by only four persons. Her statue is about forty centimetres in size. As soon as the statues are fixed on their palanquins, people carry them away for the procession. The *Mū jātrā* procession goes clockwise around the town. Usually, children carry the small palanquins belonging to the Lion-faced and Tiger-faced guardians around the town. These two palanquins complete their round of the town within a few hours. But the two big palanquins belonging to the Yellow-faced mother and the Cibhā are very heavy, and normally strong youngsters carry them on their shoulders to take round of the town. When the procession arrives in Iṃlātōl, the Chembhāri offers a couple of *marikasi*, small earthen pots containing different kinds of sweetmeats, to all the deities. As soon as he offers the *marikasi* to the deities, people eagerly try to grab them, believing that it brings them good fortune. Many men and women also believe that if they receive a chance to eat the sweets from the *marikasi*, they will beget a son.

When the palanquins have returned to the quarter from where they started, the main procession of the deities is completed. Usually the processions make a circumambulation of the town by the main route. In the years in which it is the turn of the Iṃlā quarter to receive the deities, the procession route becomes longer. On the day of *Mū jātrā*, the

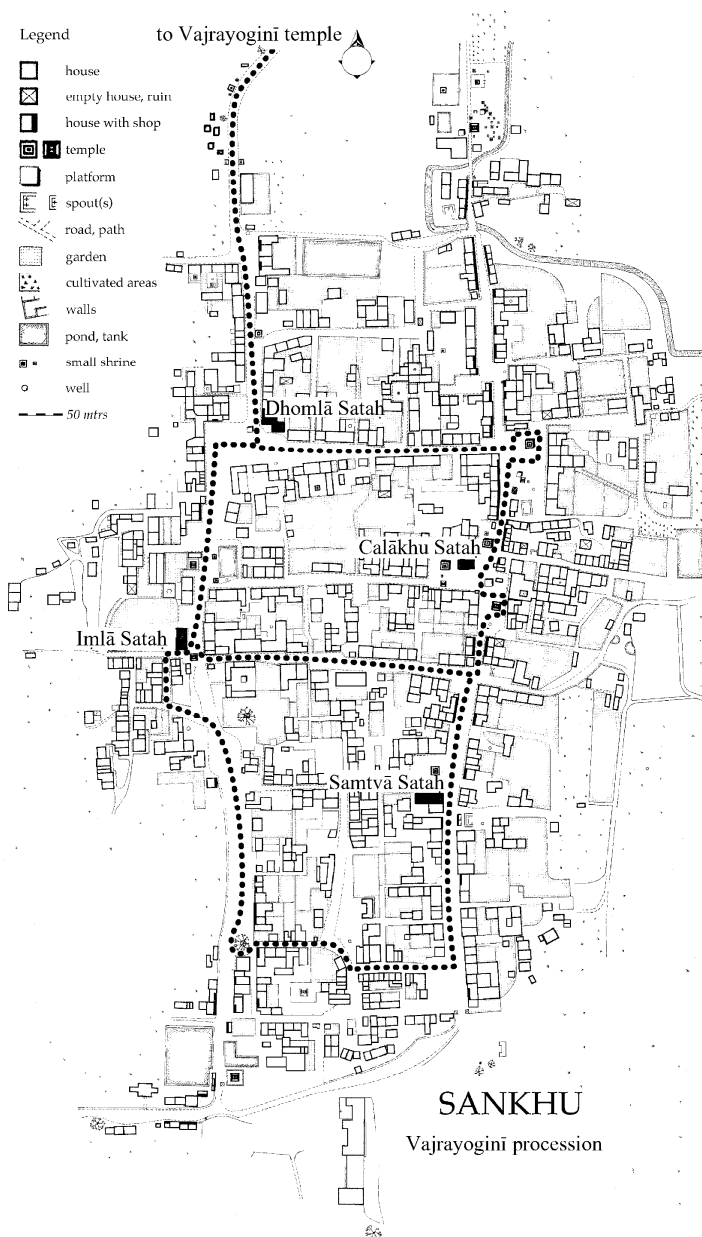
procession goes first from Iṃlātōl east to Dugāhiti, crossing the middle of the town via Dathunani. Then it makes a round of the town clockwise to the Dugāhiti quarter, from where it returns due west to Iṃlātōl via Dathunani again. This makes the festival longer than in the other years. Also, on the day of bringing the procession down from the forest temple to the town, if it is the turn of Iṃlātōl quarter to receive the procession, the procession has to follow a longer route, i.e., via Svāmlā, Dhōmlā, Sālkhā, Calākhu, Dugāhiti and Dathunani to Iṃlātōl, and also on the last day of the festival, the procession goes back along the same route to the temple. This exception is repeated once every four years. This is not the case when it is the turn of other quarters to receive the processional statues.

It is clear that Iṃlā, as the quarter with the *lāyku*, the palace, has a special status among the quarters of the town. So once every four years, when it is the turn of the Iṃlā quarter, the procession is made longer than in the other years. The other reason may be that the Iṃlā quarter is situated at the centre of the western half of the town, so when it is the turn of Iṃlā, the procession has to follow the long route to reach the quarter by making a clockwise circuit in the town. On that day it would be possible to complete a clockwise circuit of the town without taking the Dathunani-Dugāhiti route. But why the procession takes such a long route on the day of Mū jātrā by going through the Dathunani-Dugāhiti quarter is still a matter for further research. The people in Sankhu say it is because the palace is situated in the Iṃlā quarter that the procession is made longer than in other years. Another reason might be to provide a chance the procession to go through the lane below their houses for the people living between on the limits of the Dugāhiti and Iṃlā quarters.

### ***Mū bhuḡyā*: the main day of festive celebration**

After the completion of *Mū jātrā*, all the statues are placed back in the same god's rest house. This time they are not put away inside the rest house, but displayed on the veranda. Together with the four main processional statues, the Vasundharā statue is also displayed for four days. On the day the processional statues are placed on the veranda, the wood (*gvam̐sin̐*) that was carried there four days before the procession of the deities has to be burned. In the afternoon once again *Cakra pūjā* is performed in the Sālkhā quarter. In the evening, the *Duimcā nyāyekigu*, letting the Duim̐ walk, is performed. This is the most important event of the day, because it is considered to be the worship of deities by the king.





Map 15

### ***Burning the wood (Gvasiṃ cyākegu)***

Some time after the deities have been placed on the veranda, the *thekedār* begins the worship of the wood collected from the forest four days earlier. In this, a Vajrācārya priest assists him. He lights a fire, after the worship. From this day onwards, people worshipping the fire as they come to worship the processional statues in the god's rest house. People rub ash from the fire on their foreheads as a blessing mark.

The fire is kept burning till the day of taking the deities back to their forest temple. According to a Vajrācārya priest, for the remaining days of the festival this fire is the duplication of the fire in the temple of the Yellow-faced mother.

It carries the same importance as the fire in the forest temple of the Yellow-faced mother. However, the burning of the wood is not considered itself a fire sacrifice.

### ***Offering new dresses to the deities***

The VDC whose turn it is that year has to arrange the necessary materials for new dresses for all the deities in the pagoda temple of Vajrayoginī in the forest and for the processional statues. In the morning a team, which includes a Vajrācārya priest, the sword carrier, Mahām, Chembhāri and the Jogi musicians with their music go to sacrifice a goat at Mahākāla. Then they move to the temple site to change the dresses of the Red-faced mother, Simhinī and Byāghrinī in the temple of Hyāumkhvāḥ mājū (Vajrayoginī). There, they offer worship and dresses to the deities. From the temple they go straight back to the place where the processional statues are kept in order to offer worship and dresses to them also. The priest on duty changes the dresses of the deities in the temple in the veranda, and the priest keeps the old dresses. In the evening, the VDC has to provide a feast for those who have joined the team for offering the new dresses to the deities, including the musicians. Parts of the head (*sī*) of the sacrificed goat are distributed at the end of the feast.

### ***Duiṃcā nyāyekigu, making the walk of a Duiṃ***

Duiṃ is one of the Newar castes (trumpet blowers). On the occasion of *Duiṃcā nyāyekigu*, worship is carried out after making the Duiṃ take a walk in slow-pace in the town. Most probably for this reason, the ceremony began to be called *Duiṃcā nyāyekigu*.



Plate 54 Taking the walk of Duimcā: an abandoned tradition. Photo courtesy: Sjoerd Zanen (April 1979).

The *Duimcā nyāyekigu*, making the walk of a Duim, used to be arranged by another contractor (*thekedār*), the son of the ex-*dvāre*. The offering of lights, different coloured *gvaḥjā* (rice pastry), incense and worship used to be another important event of the day. On this day at about dusk, a *Kisāni*, a Newar farmer, in traditional dress and with a turban on his head, used to carry a *kota pūjā*, a ceremonial tray with materials for worship, from the *dvāre*'s house. With the *kota pūjā* in his hands he went around the town. He had to go very slowly, step by step, while walking around the town. He was accompanied by some musicians, *kāhā*, i.e., trumpet blowers, the *nāykhim* and the Jogi musical group. After having made one round of the town, he stopped at the quarter where the processional statues were

displayed, and there he offered lights and the other items of worship to all the deities.

Local people believe that the goddess Vajrayoginī granted permission to put a foot-operated pounder or pestle for husking rice (*kuti*) in every household in Sankhu at the request of king Śaṅkhadeva, the mythical king of Sankhu who is believed to have established the town. Then king Śaṅkhadeva started the tradition to carry out *Duimcā nyāyekigu pūjā* every year on the day of *Mūbijyā*. This was to honour Vajrayoginī for her kindness towards the people of Sankhu. Since the king started the tradition, it is believed that the man who represents the king, the *dvāre*, has to do this *pūjā*. As he no longer has the status of a king, the *dvāre* preferred to send a substitute by paying a nominal fee.

Unfortunately the *Duimcā nyāyekigu pūjā* was stopped in 1992, as the Kisāni ceased coming for the occasion. None of the older generation of Kisāni who used to perform the duty of *Duimcā nyāyekigu* are living now, but when I asked the son of a person who used to perform the duty he denied that the persons represented the king. He said his father used to perform the duty and the *dvāre* paid him a nominal fee for his duty. Since the duty was not financially rewarding and was not considered honourable either, his generation discontinued the duty.

### ***Offering lights by individuals***

Once the processional statues are brought down to the town, it becomes a daily routine for the people of Sankhu to offer worship every morning and to offer a wick every evening. Besides such a regular offering of wicks in the evening, almost every household of Sankhu offers 108 wick lamps (*devā*) to the deities on one of the days, commencing from *Mūbijyā*. Such an offering is made in front of the god's rest house on the ground, either by using metal containers or by using earthen ones. Many people also come to offer *mhamata* (literally: body light). For such offerings several wick lamps with oil in small earthen bowls are placed on the body of a person, who lies flat on his back until all the oil has burned and the lamps are extinguished. This takes at least three to four hours. To offer *mhamata*, the person has to remain fasting for the whole day, and he must not speak or move during the offering. In the past, many people used to come to offer *mhamata*, but nowadays it is a rare scene. The offering of *mhamata* is an act of austerity because it requires a high degree of dedication. People have not been seen the offering of *mhamata* in Sankhu for many years now.



Plate 55 Women lighting 108 lamps (*devā*) during the festival nights (April 1997).

### **Concluding Worship (*Dhum bhujyā*)**

*Dhum bhujyā* is another important day of the festival sequence. In Newar “Dhum” means the end, so some informants tried to explain it as the end or the completion of the festive celebrations. However, this does not in fact mark the end of the festival, because the activities continue on the following days. On this day, the *Duiṃcā nyāyekigu* (making the walk of the *Duiṃ*) is again carried out, but this time in the name of the queen. So, this day the *Kisāni* does not walk with the *pūjā* plate any more, but a *Duiṃ* lady does the task.

#### ***The Second day’s Duiṃcā nyāyekigu***

This day the *Duiṃcā nyāyekigu* was to be done by a woman and hence was called the queen’s *Duiṃcā nyāyekigu*. The woman who used to carry the *pūjā* plate and performed the worship was from the *Duiṃ* (trumpet-blower) caste. It is believed that on this day king Śaṅkhadev’s queen performed *pūjā* to Vajrayoginī to express her joy on the occasion of obtaining permission to provide the foot-pounder for husking rice (*kuti*) in Sankhu. People in Sankhu believe that the *Duiṃ* women performed *pūjā* on behalf of the queen. She used to carry a ceremonial tray from the

contractor's house accompanied by some assistants, Kāhā (the trumpet-blowers), the *nāykhim* and the Jogi musicians. She also had to walk at a very slow pace round the town, just as the man had done the day before. She had to offer *pūjā*, coloured *gvahjā* and wicks to all the deities at the quarter where the deities were kept that year. As people in Sankhu say, because the woman from the Duiṃ caste walked slowly, the occasion got the name from her caste. Why she had to walk slowly is not clear.

In 1995, this day's *Duimcā nyāyekigu pūjā* came to an end, as the old man who used to do the job passed away. The Duiṃ caste also had ceased their duties of blowing trumpets (*kāhā*) during different other festivals and in funeral processions. Formerly, besides the festival of Vajrayoginī, they used to blow trumpets during cow-feeding, the Vasundharā procession, the feeding of Kumārī, and at the time of distributing food for ghosts. They also used to blow trumpets in the funeral processions of various high-caste Newars in Sankhu. During the festival of Vajrayoginī they had to blow trumpets at the time of crossing the borderline between the eight quarters of the town. Since they stopped their duties, the tradition has been lost. They stopped because it was not an honourable task and it gave them little financial reward. Another reason is that gradually after the implementation of the 1964 land reforms programme in Nepal people like the Duiṃ and Kisānī were unable to get any income from the land tilled by their tenants.

### ***Bauyā*: secret rice offerings to the ghosts**

As on other days of the *nakhaḥ*, on the day of *Bauyā* the people in Sankhu also cannot boil rice in their homes, and have to eat festive food. On this day, people from outside the town are allowed to come inside to spend the night, and people believe that it is inauspicious to leave the town on this night. Usually, people in Sankhu invite their relatives and friends for a feast (*nakhaṭyā*) on this day. This is an important day because offering food to ghosts and spirits is done in the late night on this day.

The offering of food to ghosts and spirits has to be done every year in order to pacify them and free the town from any diseases and epidemics. It is believed that if they are not fed in time according to tradition, they can bring all kinds of diseases and epidemics to the town. In Kathmandu, the spreading of *bau* is done twice a year: once on the day of Akṣayaṭṭiyā in Baisākha (April), and next on the day of Gathāṃmugaḥ in Śrāvana (August). There, the purpose is different from that in Sankhu, where the people first offer *bau* to invite the ghosts from the fields to the town, because it is the time for the farmers to start the task of planting in their fields. The ghosts are invited into the town so that they do not disturb the

farmers in the fields. Later they offer *bau* to chase them back to the fields, because by that time the farmers are returned home.



Plate 56 Duim leader and one of his assistants are blowing trumpets (*kāhā*). This tradition has now ceased in Sankhu. Photo courtesy: Sjoerd Zanen (April 1979).

In Sankhu, in the middle of the night of the *Bauyāḥ*, the Nāy butcher elder (*nāyo*) goes round the town offering food to ghosts (*bau*) to appease the wandering ghosts and spirits (*bhut pret*). However, the members of an association called *Bauyā guthi* cook the *bau*, consisting of cooked rice, beans, pieces of buffalo lung and blood for offering. The Nāy *nāyo* makes a round of the town along the processional route, throwing rice on the way. Two more Nāy who play *nāykhim* music accompany him. In the past, two or three people of the Duim caste used to accompany them with their trumpets (*kāhā*), but nowadays they have stopped coming. Nobody else is supposed to see the offering of *bau* and, if somebody does so, it is said to bring him or her misfortune.

On two more nights in September (Bhādra Kṛṣṇa Aṣṭamī and Navamī) food is offered to the ghosts by the Taleju *guthi*. In the middle of the night of the Silācarhe in February or March another offering of food to ghosts and spirits used to take place as a third occasion in Sankhu, but this has been discontinued.

### ***Thahāmbijyā: bringing the processional statues up from the town to their forest temple again***

*Thahām bijyā* or procession upwards, i.e., the back to the forest temple, is the last day of the festival. On this day again the VDC has to perform worship from the palace side (*lāyku pūjā*) of the Iṃlā quarter to Gaṇeśa with a goat sacrifice, as on the day of *Kvāhāmbijyā* or on the day of *Mū jātrā*. In the evening, a feast and the distribution of the parts of head (*sī*) are done. On this day too, the Nāy have to go round the town in the morning with their *nāykhim* music to alert the people about the *Thahāmbijyā* procession. In the afternoon, the Vajrācārya priests perform a fire sacrifice in front of the god's rest house. Some Tāmāṅgs fix and tighten the palanquins. They are employed by the *thekedār* who is taking care of the palanquins. In the late evening the procession leaves from the quarter where the god's rest house is situated. This is the final day of the festival. The deities remaining in the town for eight days have to go back to their home. The Newar people believe that to return home from a journey on the eighth day is considered good, while the ninth day is considered inauspicious. In Sankhu, since the most venerable goddess of the town arrives back in her home on the ninth day, people in Sankhu do not take such a belief strictly.

### ***The fire sacrifice***

This is the second performance of a fire sacrifice in the context of the Vajrayoginī festival. Generally, a fire sacrifice prior to a festival is usual in the Kathmandu Valley, but it is rare to find another one during the same festival. This day's fire sacrifice in front of the god's rest house is called '*kṣemā pūjā homa*' the fire sacrifice to seek forgiveness. Unlike the first fire sacrifice, which the Vajrācārya priests performed at the temple site of Vajrayoginī, this one is performed in public. The five most senior Vajrācārya priests have to be present to perform it, while another Vajrācārya has to play the role of a *yajamāna*. For this day's fire sacrifice, the Vajrācāryas have to collect ingredients, in particular, different varieties of grain, from the shops in town, and these are provided to them free of cost. Other necessary materials, such as fruits, flowers, incense, wicks, a small mirror and a comb (*samājvalam*), five coloured threads (*pasukā*), *jajamkā* thread, red and yellow powder, 35 rice pastries (*gvaḥjā*), rice grains, sweetmeats (*maricari*), a *kalaśa*, a paper-made serpent (*nāg pāy*), food for the ghosts (*bau*), a bell, a thunderbolt (*vajra*), *sinhammhu* (a brass container for *tikā*), a bronze mirror used on religious occasions



(*jvālānhāykaṃ*), pine wood (*simtā*), other wood, a piece of red cloth to be offered to the Yellow-faced mother during the sacrifice, and a piece of cotton with ten betel nuts, are brought from the eldest priest's home. The eldest priest wears a red cloth, with a *dhōti* and a crown consisting of figures of the five Buddhas (*pañca* Buddha) on his head. The *yajamāna* has to wear a similar dress but without a crown. His head is shaven. All of them have to fast that day until the fire sacrifice ends.



Plate 57 The Vajracārya priests performing a fire sacrifice on day of bringing the procession statues back to the forest temple (April 1995).

In the afternoon, foursquare metres of ground in front of the god's rest house is made ready for the fire sacrifice. First, the ground is cleaned with a broom and smeared with red clay and cow dung. Then four bamboo poles are laid down around the area to prevent people from stepping over. In the middle of the square, four unbaked bricks are placed together in a square shape, and on each side another piece of brick is juxtaposed. It is called *homagāh*, the fire pit. The fire pit lies straight in front of the statue of the Yellow-faced mother goddess. Two bricks are placed together just on top of it, close to the statue of the Yellow-faced mother. On the bricks the *kalaśa* representing the Yellow-faced mother, the *nāgpāy* and a milk container (*durusali*) are placed. A priest draws eight auspicious signs (*aṣṭamangala*) over the fire pit with rice flour (*potāy*). Then, he draws

three small *mandalas* on the bricks where the *kalaśa* is placed, and three more *mandala* just above the *kalaśa*. Those three *mandalas* were for the Buddha, Dharma (religion) and Saṃgha (community). He also draws some more *mandala* close to the fire pit and the seat of the eldest priest, which lies below the fire pit facing the statue of the goddess.

To begin the fire sacrifice the eldest priest sits down on his seat. In front of him to his right are placed two rice pastries called *taḥniga* and *baniga*. The *yajamāna* sits on the left of the priest, facing in the opposite direction. The *pūjā* begins with the Guru mandala worship. With a swastika sign drawn on his right hand by the eldest priest consecrates the *yajamāna*. After the Guru mandala worship the fire sacrifice begins. First five pieces of wood are consecrated and handed over to the *yajamāna*, who puts them on the fire pit. The eldest priest puts fire in a small earthen pot (*salim*), which is called *cahoma*, the small fire sacrifice. Then, from the same fire he burns a small bundle of pieces of pinewood (*simtā*) bound with a thread, which he hands over to the *yajamāna*, and the *yajamāna* puts the burning *simtā* into the fire pit. The adding of wood into the fire pit is done immediately after the fire is lit. The eldest priest does the offering of grains and purified butter in the fire. To offer the purified butter in the fire, he uses special wooden and iron instruments. Other senior priests assist him in reciting the text and arranging things. The fire sacrifice lasts for about two hours.

At the end of the fire sacrifice, the *yajamāna* takes away the *nāgpāy* to attach it to the wall of a well situated close to the god's rest house. He also disposes off the *bau*, the food for the ghosts, at a nearby crossroads. The priest on duty takes the red cloth, which he offers to the Yellow-faced mother. Then the eldest priest starts distributing flowers, *ṭikā*, soot from the fire, five coloured threads (*pasukā*) as a blessing (*praśāda*) from the fire sacrifice to the Yajamāna, to other priests as well as to the general public. The *kalaśa* representing the Yellow-faced mother is taken out from its place and the eldest priest sprinkles sacred water from it over everybody around him. Finally, the eldest priest rises from his seat and walks in with a dancing gesture (*mudrā*) towards the veranda of the god's rest house to worship the god and goddesses, and this marks the conclusion of the fire sacrifice.

Fire sacrifices prior to processions are common to many deities all over the Valley, but a fire sacrifice at the time of return may be unique for Sankhu, or at least rare the Valley. It is as if Vajrayoginī embarks on another *yātrā*, namely the one to her forest shrine, where the goddess actually belongs. The purely Sanskrit name for the fire sacrifice at departure is *kṣemā pūjā homa*, a reception for the goddess at the fire

sacrifice to ask forgiveness (for any possible mistakes in carrying out the ritual, an obligatory part of any *yātrā*, but not in the form of an additional *homa*).

### ***Lifting the deities out of the god's rest house***

As soon as the fire sacrifice concludes, the statue of Vasundharā is lifted out from the veranda of the god's rest house to bring her back to the *āgamcheṃ*. Four Tāmāṅgs employed by the Vajrācārya priests for the purpose carry her away on her palanquin. The Vasundharā gets a ceremonial act of welcome (*lasakusa pūjā*)<sup>22</sup> in front of a place called Lasakuphalcā, which is just outside the alley leading to the *āgamcheṃ*. The wife of the eldest priest or one of the priests who is assisted by other women performs the ceremonial welcome to the Vasundharā. The goddess Vasundharā now remains in the *āgamcheṃ* till next year's festival. The Vajrācārya priests, who sit on the palanquins when the deities are brought down to the town on the main procession day and on the day when they are brought back to the temple, also receive a ceremonial welcome at the same place when they return home from their duties.

In the late evening, the other processional statues Siṃhinī, Byāghinī, Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, and Cibhā dyo are lifted out of the god's rest house and put on their palanquins. Before that, men as well as women of Sankhu come to worship the deities for the last time for that year at the god's rest house. That day, the *dāphā* musical groups also play their music there for the last time. Different musical groups start gathering in the quarter with their music. Young people as well as old come together singing and dancing to follow the procession until it stops somewhere in the town that night.

As soon as the fixing of the statues on their palanquins is completed, people carry the palanquins back to the forest temple. They follow the same route that they use to bring down the deities. Usually the procession stops after a short distance, and sometimes they are forced to stop by the youngsters of the quarter who crowd around during the late night. As it gets late, people return to their homes to sleep, leaving the palanquins with the processional statues somewhere in the town. Youngsters of the quarters through which the palanquins have to pass do their best to keep the palanquins in their vicinity. When it is the turn of other quarters than Dhomlā to receive the deities, the youngsters from Sālkhā in particular do their best to carry the palanquins to their quarter to keep them till the next morning. Sometimes they also hide parts of the palanquins so that others cannot carry them away from that quarter.

***Bare kvabvāye, the priests' jumping down from the palanquins***

Early in the morning on the following day the procession moves on again joyfully. A big crowd gathers at the Svāmlā quarter, which is just inside the gate of the town from where the processional statues will be carried out to the temple. This time, people come to watch the Vajrācārya priests jumping down from the palanquins of the Yellow-faced mother and Cibhā dyo. The priests have to jump down from the palanquins before they cross the point at which a stone *mandala* is situated on the ground with a canopy hung above it. This is the same point where they had to jump onto the palanquins on the day these were brought down. The youngsters who carry the palanquins on their shoulders run as fast as possible so as not to let the priests jump down from the palanquins at the right moment. So it becomes risky for the priests to jump down at the right moment. Generally they manage to do so, but sometimes it becomes impossible for them to jump down because it can hurt them seriously. Failing to jump down from the palanquins at the right moment is embarrassing for the priests because people tease them. There must be a priest on duty all the time at the forest temple, so he cannot come down to the town during the festival. The priests who serve during the festival are always different from the one on duty at the temple.

***Dyo mhitakegu, making the god and goddess play***

On the way to the temple at the place called Kolāgāl, some Sankhu people engage in play for the god and goddess. This play is just carrying the two main palanquins up and down the slope of Kolāgāl. Thousands of people from Sankhu and other places gather there to see the deities playing. Mainly the enthusiastic youngsters carry those two main palanquins. The show becomes quite a spectacle because the palanquins are heavy and the youngsters try their utmost to perform non-stop ups and downs on the slope. It is even more interesting to watch when the carriers change shoulders to carry the palanquins in the reverse direction.

The play can continue for two to three hours, depending upon the wishes and endurance of the people. In Sankhu it is believed this play is to amuse the deities, while it also entertains people who come to watch. At the bottom of the slope is a small water channel (*dhacā*), which is considered to be the borderline between the town and the forest. The play of the deities takes place close to the borderline. Once the palanquins have been carried across the line, they are not supposed to bring them back towards the town. So this marks the end of the play. The Duim caste

people blow their trumpets (*kāhā*) at the time of crossing the borderline, and this indicates that the palanquins cannot be brought back towards the town. As the palanquins cross the borderline most people return to their homes.

Traditionally, the Tāmāngs here join in carrying the goddess up to the forest temple. On inquiry, the Tāmāngs told me that the small channel (*dhacā*) is indeed a boundary between the Newar town and what is beyond, the Tāmāng country. It is, however, not a political dividing line or a socio-economic one but a ritual boundary, which also separates the town and its surrounding fields and the forest (*grāma* and *āranya*).

### ***The turn of the Tāmāngs to carry the palanquins up***

The residential area of the Tāmāng people is Ghumāricok, which is situated about two kilometers above the temple complex. Because the people of Ghumāricok live close to the temple site, they are believed to be the proper people of the temple area. So they are happy to carry the deities back home to the temple, whereas on the day of carrying the deities down from the temple to the town they do not come to carry the palanquins.

Those who join in carrying the palanquins during the festival are not paid. However, the VDC who receives the turn to arrange the festival for the year usually arranges for serving light snacks and beer to them on the day of bringing the palanquins down to town and on its way back to the forest temple. But on the day of *Mū jātrā* no such arrangement is required. They celebrate the festival on *Kvāhāmbijyā*, the day of bringing the procession down to the town, by sacrificing animals to Mahākāla and feasting in their homes. On *Mū jātrā* too they do not come to carry the palanquins. But Tāmāng men as well as women do come to watch the procession in the town on that day.

People in Sankhu also think that it is their duty to bring the processional statues back to the temple on time, i.e., before dark. So as soon as they finish their lunch they go to participate in carrying the palanquins back. Nowadays, at the middle of the road, the VDC (whose turn it is) serves refreshments and drinks to the people on the way back to the temple. To carry the two big palanquins back to the temple is again a difficult task. On the one hand the palanquins are very heavy, and on the other hand the way to the temple consists of uneven and steep stone steps, which makes it a real challenge to climb up. Hence only strong and experienced people have the courage to carry the palanquins back to the temple. It takes nearly a whole day to reach the temple site.



Plate 58 People are carrying back the heavy palanquin of Yellow-faced mother to her forest temple through the steep hills on the final day of the procession (April 1995).

### *Lasakusa, the ceremonial welcoming of the deities*

As the palanquins approach the temple after having passed the Mahākāla shrine, the members of the Lasakusa *guthi* perform the ceremonial welcome for all the processional statues: Siṃhinī, Byāghinī, Cibhā dyo and Mhāsukhvāḥ māju. This is a multi-caste *guthi* consisting of four members who are all from Kathmandu. The procession stops, as soon as the palanquins arrive back at the site from where they were carried down to town on the full-moon day. The untying and lifting of the statues from the palanquins is done there. From there to the temple, people carry the processional statues on their hands or on their shoulders. Until the statues have been placed properly in the temple the *nāykhim* music is played in *bārādāyegu* tune, and the ringing of the bells and playing of other music also continue. As soon as the installation is concluded, the members of Lasakusa *guthi* distribute festive food (*samaybaji*) to everybody assembled in the temple complex. The people eat the *samaybaji* as the blessing from the goddess.

Once the statues are installed back in their respective places in the temple, the festival for that year is comes to an end.

### ***Storing the ornaments and returning the crown***

In the presence of the VDC chairmen, the police, the Mahām, and the Vajrācārya priests, the ornaments belonging to the Hyāumkhvāḥ māju are removed from the processional statues and given back to the Vajrācārya priest in the goddess' temple. The priest stores the ornaments in a trunk in the temple and he is now responsible for them. The responsibility shifts to his successor as soon as his turn in the temple ends.

The crown (*matu* or *kikimpā*) worn by the Yellow-faced mother during the festival gets special treatment. The Mahām carries it in his hand in a procession down to the town. On the way to the town VDC chairmen (usually all three), the priests who sat on the palanquins, and others follow him. Several pairs of *nāykhim*, *dhime*, *dhā* music and the Jogi musicians return to town with them. At Kolāgā phalcā, the royal sword awaits the arrival of the crown, and now joins the procession to the town. On this occasion, they enter the town from the northeastern gate i.e., via Sālkhā, Calākhū, Dugāhiti and Dathunani, and then go to the Imlā quarter. There they go inside the palace courtyard. The crown carrier and the sword carrier both have to step on the Lāykudabū and sit there for a while.

Then they go to the house where the sword was kept that year. There the royal sword is left behind. The crown carrier continues to the Mahām's home, nowadays to the assistant Mahām's home, because the main Mahām's home is not inside the town. When the crown is carried inside the assistant Mahām's home, the musical groups leave for their homes. Late in the evening, the Mahām carries the crown to the eldest Vajrācārya's home secretly, and there it remains for the rest of the year.

### ***The ceremonial welcome to the priests***

The Vajrācārya priests who sat on the palanquins during the procession cannot go to their homes before the processional statues have been installed in the temple. They go with the procession to the temple and come back to town with the crown procession. They leave the procession when they arrive at the Sālkhā quarter. From the Sālkhā quarter they go to their *āgamchem* site. By the side of the Lasakuphalcā they receive ceremonial worship by the eldest priest or other priests. Then they go to the eldest priest's home and give him and his family flowers from the temple. They also distribute flowers to other senior priests, and a few other families in Sankhu, whose ancestors have contributed to the temple in the past (see above).



Plate 59 As the procession ends, the crown of the goddess Vajrayoginī is carried down to the town in a procession to store in the eldest Vajrācārya's home. The royal sword carrier is also seen in the procession (April 1988).

### ***Bicāḥ pūjā: final worship in the temple***

Three days after the processional statues have been returned to the temple, the *Bicāḥ pūjā*, final worship in the temple, begins. It lasts for two days. The first day's worship is called *Jujuyā bicāḥ pūjā*, the King's worship and second day's is called *Lāniyā bicāḥ pūjā*, the Queen's worship. The two are also known as *sarakāri pūjā*, the worship of the government, or *lāyku pūjā*, the worship of the palace. The *bicāḥ pūjā* worship takes place at various levels. Every household in Sankhu must go up for *bicāḥ pūjā* on either of the two days. Every household of Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu must go with a *kalah pūjā* to the temple for *bicāḥ pūjā* on a day convenient to them, but not later than fifteen days after the main *bicāḥ pūjā*.

### ***The final worship from the ordinary people***

Most families in Sankhu go to the temple for the final worship on the first day of *bicāḥ pūjā*. They believe it is appropriate to go to look and to take care of the god and goddesses who were in procession in the town, and see whether they are in good condition or not. People also consider it as a



*kṣemā pūjā*, worship for forgiveness. They have to take a *kalah pūjā* and worship all the deities at the temples of Mhāsukhvāḥ māju, Hyāumkhvāḥ māju and Jogeśvara and to Mahākāla. After the worship, they have to eat a feast at the temple site. A portion of the feast (*dyo bvaḥ*), which consists of all the dishes they eat, is offered to the Yellow-faced mother. Usually family members, married sisters and daughters, relatives and friends go in groups for the *bicāḥ pūjā* feast. People eat their feast either in the rest houses at the temple site or on the open ground in the forest. If they eat it in the rest house, a portion is offered to the rest house (*sataḥbvaḥ*), and if they eat on the open ground a portion is offered to the ground (*khyahbvaḥ*). On the way back to their homes, they have to offer a light at Kolāgāl to a stone shrine and worship it. It is called *lisvamata bigu*, the offering of a light while looking back. Everybody who comes for the final worship has to do this. After the *pūjā*, they take a short rest on the ground and eat snacks and drinks. Then they go straight to their homes. For the general people the *bicāḥ pūjā* marks the end of the festival.

### ***The Vajrācārya priests' final worship***

The Vajrācārya priests in Sankhu do not necessarily perform their final worship on the same days as others do. They can perform their worship on a convenient day after the days officially designated for the *bicāḥ pūjā*. However, every Vajrācārya family must bring a *kalah pūjā* to observe the *bicāḥ pūjā*. Only those priests who are busy on the days of *bicāḥ pūjā* choose another convenient day, and otherwise most of them observe the *bicāḥ pūjā* on the same days as other people do.

### ***Lāyku pūjā, the final worship from the palace***

*Lāyku pūjā* or the King and Queen's *pūjā* are considered as the most important final worship because they are from the royal palace. Items for the worship are prepared in the sword carrier's home or in the VDC head's home where the sword is kept. A *kota pūjā* with a sacrificial goat is made ready for the *pūjā*. The worship team leaves from the sword carrier's home. The team consists of the sword carrier and his family members, the Chembhāri, the Mahām, and a few other people who assist them during the festival. A Vajrācārya priest, employed by the sword carrier to carry out the worship, carries the *pūjā* plate himself from the sword carrier's house to the temple. The Jogi musical group accompanies them.

The main worship is done at the Mahākāla Bhairava. The Vajrācārya priest reserves a corner of the ground floor in a resting place, which is

situated in front of the Mahākāla shrine. After cleaning the place, the priest performs an elaborate ritual worship. He draws some *mandala* over the ground with rice flour. A *kalaśa* is placed on a *mandala*, which represents the Mahākāla. Then he places some twelve rice pastries (*gvahjā*) in the name of different deities, which include the deities carried in the procession and those that remained in the temple. He offers a coconut with its shell in the name of the goddess Vajrayoginī. Then he puts a portion of food for the ghosts (*bau*) on his left corner. He begins his worship with the performance of the Guru *mandala pūjā*. In an earthen pot he makes soot from a wick. On the right of the priest a Sukundā, a special lamp with a figure of Gaṇeśa, is placed. On his left sits the sword carrier who performs the role of *yajamāna*. As soon as the soot is made, the *pūjā* at the rest house ends. Then they move to the Mahākāla shrine for the goat sacrifice. The goat is consecrated by the priest and is taken to the Mahākāla shrine for the sacrifice as soon as it gives its consent by shivering its body. Its throat is slit and blood is sprayed over the Mahākāla shrine and on the Gaṇeśa. After completing the worship, the priest gives *ṭikā*, soot, flowers, and a cloth garland (*kokhā*) to the sword carrier and his family, to the Chembhāri, the Mahām and to other people who are present. In return he receives some money (*dakṣiṇā*) from the people.

Then they move up to the temple complex of Vajrayoginī, but they do not perform such an elaborate act of worship for the Red-faced mother, Jogeśvara and the Yellow-faced mother. They just perform a simple worship in those three temples. After this they eat their feast. The VDC whose turn it is for the feast can invite anyone according to his need.

The priest distributes *ṭikā*, soot, cloth garlands, and flowers as blessings (*prasād*) to everybody sitting outside the Yellow-faced mother's temple.

The next day, the queen's worship is performed in similar manner, but on that day the sword carrier's wife plays the role of *yajamāna*. The sword carrier himself is absent on that occasion.

One or two days after the *bicāḥ pūjā*, the Mahām carries the royal sword back to the Hanumāṇdhokā palace. With Jogi musicians, people go to see the sword off at Masyāṃputācā, where it was received four days before the deities were brought down to the town. On the day of its return to Kathmandu, the sword carrier has to return it to the Mahām at the same spot from where he had received it. Once again, the Mahām unveils the sword for the last occasion. Then he puts it back into its sheath and then into its cloth bag to carry it back to Kathmandu. Together with the sword, he has to take a piece of meat from the sacrificed goat of the *bicāḥ pūjā*, flowers and *ṭikā* as blessing (*prasād*) from the goddess Vajrayoginī to

Hanumāṇḍhokā for the king. These he hands over to the officer of Hanumāṇḍhokā, later to be carried to the royal palace by a member of staff at the Hanumāṇḍhokā office.

### **Interpreting the Vajrayoginī festival**

Having arrived at the end of the description of the festival of Vajrayoginī, one is overwhelmed by the number of actors, events and stories combined in this large and protracted ritual happening. Now that detailed data have been presented in chronological order, an attempt can be made at analysis and explanation according to various themes, which can be extracted from the body of the research material. It should be stressed that no official explanation of the overall significance of the festival exists. Neither do local informants agree on its significance, although various interpretations exist on certain *pūjā* or other details of the festival.<sup>23</sup> The only written text specifically concerning the festival is a ritual manual, the MMC, used by the Vajrācārya priests. It describes how the festival should be celebrated, but it does not elaborate on the significance of the festival as a whole. Zanen (1986) was the first scholar to give an elaborate interpretation of the festival. The point of departure for his analysis is the question: why does the goddess come to the town (1986:158).

In this section, I will restrict my analysis to the festival, its significant features and, wherever possible, its explanation. The themes or dimensions (which I will call contexts) chosen are: the cosmological context, the religious context, the spatial context, the social and the socio-ritual contexts, the political context and the economic context. These themes were chosen for analytical reasons only. In practice, during the festival all dimensions are ritualised to such an encompassing extent that social sectors and actors are united or linked, rather than being isolated or distinguished from each other. Analysing various contexts separately, an attempt will be made to find clues as to the overall significance of the festival of Vajrayoginī.

### **The cosmic and the seasonal contexts**

The spring-festival of Vajrayoginī starts on Caitra Śukla Purnimā or on the full-moon day of Cillā, either in March or in April. For both Hindu and Buddhist religious people all full-moon days are important days. In Sankhu as well as in other parts of the Valley, there are several religious ceremonies and festivals on the full-moon day of Cillā. For example Bālāju, a small Newar town situated to the north of the city of Kathmandu,

which has now turned into a suburb of greater Kathmandu, observes the yearly festival of twenty-two spouts and worship of an Ajimā, a mother goddess. On this day, many people visit Bālāju to take a holy bath and worship Ajimā. Similarly, Manamaiju, a small Newar town situated further north of Bālāju, celebrates its yearly festival and procession of Indrāyaṇī, the patron goddess of the town on the same day.

In Kathmandu itself, this is the day for conducting the procession of the goddess Mhaypī through the old city. Just as the goddess Vajrayoginī, both Mhaypī and Manamaiju are considered to be Buddhist deities, because their priests as well as patrons are Buddhist. The full-moon of Caitra is also the day to visit the famous Buddhist shrine Svayambhū in Kathmandu. Many men and women also climb up the Nāgārjun Mountain, which is considered to be one of the oldest Buddhist places of pilgrimage and is believed to be one of the oldest Buddhist settlements. The top of the Nāgārjun Mountain is also known as Jāmācva, where the human Buddha, Vipasvi, settled down when the Valley was still a lake. The myth is that Vipasvi sowed the lotus seed on the full-moon day of Caitra, and this bloomed on the surface of the water and sent forth a flame called Svayambhū (Anderson 1988:272).

For all these reasons, the Caitra full-moon is considered by Buddhist to be one of the most holy full-moon days. It may be tentatively concluded that the period of the festival of Vajrayoginī coincides with a most auspicious month for the Buddhists, and that the full-moon of this month is associated with the first phase in the myth of the creation of the Valley of Nepal (today's Kathmandu Valley). As Vajrayoginī is associated mythically with the creation of the valley of Sankhu - a myth not unrelated to the creation myth of the Nepal valley - it seems reasonable to assume that the date of the Vajrayoginī festival points in the direction of another act of creation, this time by the goddess Vajrayoginī. Cosmologically, the full-moon of Caitra is considered a propitious date for creation by the Buddhists of Nepal.

From the viewpoint of change of season, this festival is considered to be the last spring festival of the town. At the same time, this is also the time of the change of the ritual year based on Puṇamāntaka, or the month ending on the day of the full-moon, which is also known as Caitrādi or the year ends in the Caitra month. It is likely that the festival of Vajrayoginī might have originated in the celebration of the New Year according to Caitrādi calendar.

## The religious context

Apart from Vajrayoginī, another Buddhist female deity also plays a role during the festival. She is Vasundharā Devī, also kept by the Vajrācāryas. In Nepal, she is compared to the Hindu goddess of wealth, Lakṣmī, and is considered as the bestower and protector of agriculture (Shakya 1994:15-21 and Anderson 1988:70, 183). Her role during the festival is not entirely clear. The MM says that the tradition of her procession in the town existed long before the procession of Vajrayoginī was initiated. However, as it is now, she only appears in public during Mū jātrā, and then joins the other deities during the rest of the festival. Her appearance suggests that the festival consists of two parts, and that Vasundharā Devī - and with her perhaps agriculture and rice-production - are only associated with the second part of the festival, from the fourth day (Mū jātrā) onwards. A change in the character of the festival is also accentuated by the appearance of Vajrayoginī and her company in public, i.e., on the open veranda and later in the jātrā after having been kept inside the god's rest house during the first three days of the festival. It seems that during the festival the notions of seclusion and inactivity on the part of the deities (inside the god's rest house) are intentionally contrasted with public appearance and activity (during their pompous jātrā through the town).

The myth of Vajrayoginī, which tells about her creation of the first priest whose descendants were later, in the Kali era, involved in the creation of a kingdom, indicates the goddess Vajrayoginī's timeless character, while the Sankhu Vasundharā Devī, who has her god's house in the town in the Vajrācārya quarter, is associated with the historical kingdom or town where the priests reside. Vasundharā Devī seems to be linked to the sphere of the kingdom and its subjects, in contrast to Vajrayoginī who is associated with the "jungle" or the "forest" outside the human realm. The Nepalese notion of Vasundharā Devī as the goddess of agriculture and wealth fits the above notion, namely that she is associated with the economic pursuits of the kingdom's subjects. Perhaps her appearance during the festival on the day of Mū jātrā signifies the start of agriculture as a mode of livelihood, or the origin of the kingdom itself. In that case, during the festival the first half of the celebration is associated with the absence of a kingdom, while the second part is associated with a kingdom; this implies the creation of a kingdom (as in her mythology) between the two parts of the festival.

## The spatial context

Throughout the festival, spatial categories and borders are emphasised. While coming down from their temple complex, the deities first pass the shrine of Mahākāla. This shrine is the major altar for blood sacrifices, both for the people of Sankhu as well as for the Tāmāṅs of neighbouring villages on the hill. Just above this place no blood sacrifices should be performed, and even the wearing of leather shoes is prohibited, which indicates the pure and Buddhist character of the temple complex where most sacrifices are indeed of the vegetarian kind (except some secret tantric rituals). Mahākāla is called ‘the gatekeeper’ of Vajrayoginī, and symbolises the gate to the Gumbāhāḥ “forest monastery” complex. It is a point of debate whether Gumbāhāḥ should be considered as being situated within the “kingdom of Sankhu” or outside it.

At the foothill there is a small stream called Kolāgāl, where, on the way back from the town to the temple, the palanquin carriers let the deities “dance” with each other. This place is considered a ritual borderline between the human realm of the kingdom (*grāma*) and the wilderness (*āraṇya*). The goddess Vajrayoginī clearly belongs to the sphere of the wilderness and only comes to the civilised world on a temporary visit. The meaning of this visit is the subject of this section of enquiry.

Further on, having entered the town, the principal deities are subjected to human care and direction by priests and devotees. They respect the urban social order strictly by following an established processional route whereby the crossing of each border is underlined by special music. Through the deities’ procession and stay in Sankhu the town’s main physical structure is manifested: the upper and lower town, the eight quarters, the procession-route, the palace and the main shrines. One may also presume that the goddess maps out a certain territory and defines or gives ritual meaning to that territory, i.e., the place to become the seat of royal power (the palace) being the centre of the town which is circumambulated by the procession.

## The social and socio-ritual contexts

In a social context, the first remarkable happening during the festival is the relaxation of caste distinctions. During the whole festival, carriers, crowds and devotees mingle easily, the first *pūjā* to the deities in town is performed by the unclean caste Nāy, and the main day of sacrifice in the town is a free-for-all, priestless and casteless, individual family affair without conventions and formal rules for distribution of the *prasād*. The

festival is for all the inhabitants of the town, irrespective of caste and creed.

Every family celebrates the feast, and family members who live elsewhere return to their place of origin to celebrate the feast. Even the descendants of those who moved out from the town and settled permanently elsewhere several generations ago were also found celebrating this festival by organising a feast within their own families where they are presently residing.<sup>24</sup> In the past, certain contributions by every family were obligatory. Although compulsory participation has been abolished, no family would want to remain aloof from public and private participation in the festival - the youth not from carrying the palanquins in which prestige is to be gained, the women not from cooking meals to entertain family members and guests alike, the rich and the poor, the young and the old not from gaining religious bliss and toasting their health with a good drink. On the night of the Mū jātrā fights break out and this may be understood as a legitimised outlet for social tensions in a well-knit society, which may run high, underneath. This too is part of the total communal constellation of the festival. This egalitarian social representation seems intentional, as if meant to express that before the Goddess all creatures are equal.

The majorities of the rituals are carried out by *guthi* of all kinds and are of various social compositions. As we know from our earlier discussion, the largest number of *guthi* that are active in the town are related to Vajrayoginī, and among them twenty are related to her festival. Two *guthis* (Jātrā *guthi* and Khucupā) that belong to the Vajrācārya are responsible for carrying out the invitation, worship, fire sacrifices, daily bathing and offering of food. They also look after the deities during the festival. Tisābicāḥ *guthi* and Matu *guthi* take care of the ornaments of the deities, two Svām *guthi* offer flowers, flags and food to deities on the first day of procession, the Ilām *guthi* hangs a canopy adjacent to the town gate from where the deities are carried inside the town and back to the temple, four different Dāphā *guthi* perform music, Ārati *guthi* offer lights at the *dyo sataḥ*, the Lasakusa *guthi* also offer lights at the *dyo sataḥ* during the festival, perform welcome worship when the palanquins are brought back to the temple and distribute festive food, and the Jogi Phalcā *guthi* also distribute festive food on the first day of the festival. Similarly, two *guthi* belonging to the Thekedār (Kha *guthi* and Cakra pūjā *guthi*), are responsible for fixing the palanquins, and for performing an act of sacrificial worship called *cakra pūjā* on the fourth and fifth days of the festival. The Jātrā *guthi* run by VDCs see to the announcement of the festival, bringing the royal sword, the offering of sacrifices on behalf of the reigning king, the offering of new dresses to deities, performing *bicāḥ*

*pūjā* on behalf of the king and queen and arranging snacks and drinks for the carriers of palanquins on the first and the last days of the processions. Spontaneously, people of the quarter where the deities are kept in that year bring the necessary wood for the fire during the festival. All the activities of *guthi* and individual initiatives give pomp and lustre to the festival. Without these *guthi*, the festival would be a poor performance. The contribution of the *guthi* is a mark of the organisation of the religious civil society, which is a unique Newar social phenomenon. They are, as it were, the skeleton of socio-religious manifestations, their infrastructure and their upkeep. The decline of the *guthi*-system, as is already the case in Sankhu too, is a cause of anxiety with respect to the continuity of Newar cultural manifestations such as the big religious festivals. In the case of the Vajrayoginī festival, the retreat of *guthi* in organising certain *pūjās* risks further obscuring the significance of the festival and reducing it to a fun fair only.

### The political-ritual context

The government Guthi Corporation finances much of the festival expenses. The VDCs in Sankhu play an important role in its organisation. As we know from the historical notes found in MMC and MMC-I, the reigning king himself used to be present during the festival of Vajrayoginī in the past, and it was only during the reign of the last Malla king Jayprakash that a royal sword was carried to represent him, as he was unable to attend the festival himself. Later, this has become a tradition practiced till today. As we saw, a royal sword from the national palace directs the processions, and the festival proceeds “by order of the King.” One may conclude from this that the Vajrayoginī festival is a national festival organised by the government and in the name of the king.<sup>25</sup> However, the goddess Vajrayoginī is not the tutelary goddess of the king of Nepal (this is Taleju), so that there is no special relationship between the two which would require the presence of the king during the festival. Indeed, only a royal sword from the old palace represents the king. Such symbolic presence is common in the case of many religious festivals in Nepal.

Although the above conclusions appear straightforward enough, questions must be raised concerning the historical relationship between the goddess Vajrayoginī and sovereignty and the expression of this relationship during the festival. The fieldwork material about the performance of ‘the king’ during the festival is scarce. On the day after Mū jātrā (until seven years ago), a descendant of the last local ‘king’



(*dvāre*) of Sankhu, as a *thekedār*, used to employ a Kisani man of the farmer's caste who was thought to represent the king and made a ritual circumambulation in the town before worshipping the deities. This *pūjā* has been abandoned. However, it is still popularly believed that on the day after Mū jātrā the king worships the deities. This worship is connected with the goddess Vajrayoginī, who long ago introduced a rice pounder (*kuti*). The festival-king is thought to represent Śaṅkhadeva himself, the king whom the goddess said to have created. The mention of a rice pounder is again a reference to agriculture. The next day, a woman repeats (used to repeat) the previous day's acts of the 'king', and this is thought to be a *pūjā* on behalf of 'the queen'. Three days after the festival, when the statues have returned to their temples, there are several final acts of worship, called the King's worship (Jujuyā *bicāḥ pūjā*) and the Queen's worship (Lāniyā *bicāḥ pūjā*), but in this case it must be assumed that the worship is performed on behalf of the actual royal family, as it is prepared by the VDC and the 'royal sword carrier'.

Zanen comments on the extremely poor show by the pathetic festival-'king' (without any royal regalia) compared with the *jātrā* of the goddess on the previous day. He proposes to attribute this to the disturbance and reversal of the normal order, which is not uncommon during representations of cosmogonic acts during Hindu-Buddhist festivals. This abnormality is further illustrated by the 'free for all' sacrifice and the first *pūjā* by 'unclean' persons. During the festival, Vajrayoginī herself is the temporary sovereign of the kingdom, which marks an uneasy situation vis-à-vis the king. The true relationship of the goddess and the king can only be as *bhikṣus*: "The *yoginī*, it is true, is the creator of the king, but as soon as the king is installed and his kingdom initiated, the *yoginī* retreats to the forest again to resume her life as a *bhikṣu*. Afterwards, the king can only meet her by being a *bhikṣu* himself, but then he has ceased to be a sovereign" (Zanen 1986:161). And indeed we know from the chronicles that Gumbāhāḥ has been the refuge for retired monarchs, doing penance or practising austerities. And it is a popular belief that the king of Nepal, should not visit the temple complex of Vajrayoginī, at the risk of national calamities.

A comparative analysis may clarify better the relationship between the goddess and the 'king' during the festival. We think, of course, of Kathmandu, where, during Indra jātrā, the reigning king of Nepal used to worship his tutelary goddess Taleju in the form of the human virgin-goddess Kumārī, and received from her a re-consecration for the coming year. The difference between the festival of Sankhu and one in Kathmandu is that the 'king' of Sankhu is not a reigning king, and that Vajrayoginī is

not a tutelary goddess of any living king. The similarity of the two festivals is the public worship of a goddess by a sovereign. Although both are considered divine, the king is here in a subordinate, supplicating position. While worshipping her, he is stripped of his regalia. In Sankhu, the prohibition on royal display (riding on horseback or on an elephant, carriers, umbrellas, etc.) is explicit. A further resemblance between the Kathmandu and the Sankhu king-goddess relationship is the character of the goddess, a virgin in Kathmandu, and a *yoginī* in Sankhu, being both forms of a lonely, detached deity, as if to stress their natural disclaim of possible matrimonial relations (with whomsoever): in the deities' asocial disposition seems to reside their power. In both cases their power serves to invigorate kingship and the kingdom. In Kathmandu as well as in Sankhu, after the ceremony the goddess retreats to her residence. In Kathmandu she retires to the Kumāri chem, the god house made for the virgin goddess, but not very far away from the public world. In Sankhu, after having circumambulated the centre of the town symbolised by the palace, she retreats to her forest sanctuary outside the realm of the kingdom. This retreat also ends the divine festival period and indicates a resumption of worldly life. It may be concluded that parallels clearly exist in the symbolical representations of both festivals.

### The economic context

To allow the festival to take place, enormous sums are spent, not only by the government, but also by the various private *guthis* and by individuals. An estimate of costs presents the following picture:

In 1997, I made a rough estimation of the total expenditure during the festival, which was roughly more than three million Nepalese rupees (40,000 US dollars). Individual families incurred most expenses, while the various *guthis* that are responsible for carrying out different functions spent around 100,000 rupees only. As the VDC chairman whose turn it was in 1997 told me, his expenses were about thirty thousand rupees that year. The VDC whose turn it is organises announcement of the festival, brings the royal sword from Kathmandu and back, performs worship with a goat sacrifice at Iṃlā Gaṇeśa on the full-moon day, sacrifices a goat at Mahākāla Bhairava and offers dresses to fixed statues and processional statues of Vajrayoginī on the fifth day of the festival, arranges drinks and snacks for the palanquin carriers on the first and the last days of the procession, performs *bicāḥ pūjā* on behalf of the reigning king and queen and provides festive meals for people. In 1997, the *thekedār* who runs the Kha *guthi* and Cakra *pūjā guthi* received twelve thousand rupees to fix the

palanquins of the deities, and to pay for worship, sacrifices and feasts during the festival. Although the *thekedār* complains that the amount he received is insufficient, people think that he makes a profit from his duties.

The Jātrā *guthi* and Khucupā *guthi* belonging to Vajrācārya priests spent about eight thousand rupees for various kinds of worship, fire sacrifices, food offerings to deities and festive meals during the festival. Two Svām *guthi* spent less than a thousand rupees each for the worship and offerings on the first day of the festival. Among the four Dāphā groups, the Sāymi Dāphā *guthi* spent more than ten thousand rupees to perform sacrificial worship at Mahākāla Bhairava, to eat a festive meal on the first day of the festival and to feed light snacks and drinks to musicians in the following days. Other *dāphā* groups spent less than thousand each for Nāsaḥ *pūjā* and eating *samaybaji*. As the *guthi nāyo* told me, the Lasakusa *guthi* spent nearly twenty thousand rupees for daily worship, offerings of lights, sacrifices, festive meals, and distributing *samaybaji*. The Jogi Phalcā *guthi* spent about two thousand rupees for the cock sacrifice at the Mahākāla Bhairava, distributing *samaybaji* and eating the festive meal on the first day of the festival. The Ārati *guthi* spent about two thousand rupees on offerings, lights and eating a festive meal during the festival, while the Ilām *guthi* spent about five thousand on offering a goat sacrifice, eating a *sikāḥbhvay* and offering a canopy on the first day of the festival.

Similarly the Matu *guthi* spent about five thousand on performing worship with a goat sacrifice at the shrine of Mahākāla Bhairava and eating a festive meal three days before the procession of the deities. The Bau Holegu *guthi* whose duty it is to arrange the throwing of food for the ghosts, spent nearly two thousand rupees for the purpose, including festive meals for the *guthi* members. The Mākaḥ *bicāḥ pūjā guthi* spent around ten thousand rupees for the sacrificial worship at the Mahākāla and feeding a festive meal to their family members. Since the festival of Vajrayoginī is the most important one for the people of the town, they try to arrange festive meals (*bhvay*) that are as lavish as possible during the festival. The third day of the festival is the day of sacrifice and feast. On this day, those who can afford it sacrifice goats, ducks and cocks to different deities (Mahākāla, the quarter Gaṇeśa and Mātrkā shrines). Most people, however, buy buffalo meat from local butchers' shops. In the following days too, they eat festive meals and invite their friends and relatives to meals (*nakhaṭyā*). The amounts of their expenses depend on the sources of income of a family and number of guests. However, even the families with very low income spend no less than a thousand rupees. Some of the rich families' expenses exceed twenty thousand. The rough

estimate is that on average each household spends 3,500 rupees, which means that the 789 households in the town spent a total of nearly three million rupees. Their expenditure was mainly on buying meat, beans, vegetables, beaten rice, drinks, materials for worship and clothes. For most families in the town it was also an occasion to buy new clothes for their children and other members of the family.

For the people of Sankhu, the time of the festival of Vajrayoginī is not one for making money or profit but for spending money on entertainment by eating, drinking and wearing new clothes. However, those traders who sell materials for festive foods and clothes make good money during the festival. Similarly, the *thekedār*, who receives money from the Guthi Corporation to run *guthi* may make certain profits, as is the case with a few individual members of certain *guthi* whose income from land is more than the expenses they make. However, the main motive behind the celebration of the festival is not to gain or make profit but to show respect and dedication to the goddess. At the same time, this is also an occasion for people in the town to display their social status.

### **The role of the media**

In the past, taking pictures of the processional statues of Vajrayoginī was strictly forbidden, but such restrictions have gradually been relaxed since 1990 with the change of politics in Nepal. In 1993, for the first time, this researcher experimented with video recording of some of the events of the procession to test public opinion. Although some people protested, many appreciated it. In the following years, especially in 1995 and 1996, this researcher did a complete video recording of the major events of the festival, intending to make a documentary of the festival. These recordings brought about a landmark change with regard to giving exposure to activities of the festival through the camera. In the past, sporadic mentions of the festival of Vajrayoginī were to be found in a few newspapers such as Gorkhāpatra or The Rising Nepal, Ināp and Viswobhumi. Together with the 1990 political change many new local and national newspapers began to be published. These new publications helped a great deal to give more exposure to the festival of Vajrayoginī. National dailies such as The Kathmandu Post, Kāntipur, Nepal Samācārptra and Sandhyā Times began to publish the news of the festival Vajrayoginī with pictures every year. Such news also began to be aired for the international community through their Internet sites. Radio Nepal, the only national radio, and several newly established FM radios such as Radio Sagarmāthā, Metro FM, Image Channel, Kath, and ABC also began to highlight the festival in their

respective broadcasts. On top of that, since 2000 Nepal Television also began to highlight the festival of Vajrayoginī in its broadcasts. It can be assumed that the festival of Vajrayoginī will be receiving more and more publicity in the coming years.

### Concluding remarks

The fieldwork material does not allow an unambiguous explanation of the original meaning of the Vajrayoginī festival. However, combined with comparative historical, mythological and ritual material, a more or less coherent picture emerges which fits the general configuration of Newar religious expression. Probably the festival re-enacts the glorious creation of the Sankhu kingdom and its first king, being a divine act by the goddess Vajrayoginī as a reward to her devotees.

Apart from representations of cosmogonic nature, however, the festival is of great social importance as it transforms worldly life and its institutions into a temporarily ritual state. During her stay in Sankhu the goddess takes over authority, the police are visible with the symbolic king, the sword carrier, but their presence remains only symbolic, and the VDCs are merely servants and cannot even prevent fighting on Mū jātrā. The lifting of caste distinctions and the communal consumption of the sacrificial remains gives the impression of a celebration of archaic or celestial Buddhist legality and unity. Worldly commerce also comes to a stop, and moneylenders are warned to halt their business. Enormous expenses are incurred for sacrificial and devotional reasons such as facilitating *pūjā*. The whole universe of Sankhu is ritualised, the earth-heaven distinction is lifted, and this process is of a total kind, excluding nothing and nobody: in a Maussian sense, the festival can be considered a total social fact, or rather a total ritual fact, as the ritual encompasses all socio-economic life and its institutions. The ritual scene enacted during the festival is of vital importance and the correct performance of the festival is a matter of life or death for the whole community of Sankhu. Should an accident occur with the processional statues, or should the various rituals fail to be executed, the consequences would be dramatic for Sankhu and for the Kingdom of Nepal. Certain references to such disasters were found in the chronicles. The King-Kumārī relationship in Kathmandu is subject to the same hazards.

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

# THE DANCES OF DEVĪ: THE MANIFESTATIONS OF THE GODDESS VAJRAYOGINĪ

### Introduction

Several places in the Kathmandu Valley perform masked dances in which the goddess (Devī) defeats her demon adversary, Daitya. The yearly Devī dance (*pyākham*) in the capital of Kathmandu is performed during Indra yātrā, the eight-day festival of the king of the gods. A salient feature of the performances is that Daitya goes about unmasked, as if he stands somewhat closer to human beings than the masked goddess who slays him or rather, who subdues him. Daitya is not to be killed in the drama - at a deeper level animosity goes together with affinity in the relations of the two opposing sides.

An invisible but all the more salient feature of the Devī *pyākham* in the small town of Sankhu is that Daitya is not staged at all, in spite of the fact that his defeat is commemorated in the accompanying songs and enacted by the three protagonists brandishing their swords. According to local lore, when the Devī *pyākham* of Sankhu was invited to the court of Kathmandu it was ridiculed because the protagonists, Devī, Caṇḍī and Bhairava, had no real antagonist. However, when Devī slashed her sword in a stone to mark the slaying of Daitya, her force was so strong that the Daitya performer of the Kathmandu's Devī dance died at that instant, without even being touched. The Devī *pyākham* of Sankhu has not been invited to the capital since.

If invited by a benefactor, the Sankhu Devī Dances can be performed any time between Kāyāṣṭmī (four days before the start of Indra yātrā) and Vijayā Daśamī, the last day of the Daśain festival. After that it cannot be performed until Svanti (the festival of light known in Nepali as Tihār). Furthermore, it is not allowed to perform the dance at the time of Sankhu Vajrayoginī yātrā, the town's main festival. The prohibition starts from the moment the goddess is invited, the invitation of the goddess (*nimantraṇa*),

till her farewell ritual (*bicāḥ pūjā*). The prohibitions are mentioned in the text of instructions for the Vajrācārya, but no further explanation is given about the reason why. The dance association members do not know about the prohibition, so they said that the dance might be performed throughout the year. Vajrayoginī is the main goddess of Sankhu, and her shrine is situated on the hill above the town (Toffin 1992:77). At all other times of the year it is not forbidden to perform the Devī dance. In the absence of any patrons or sponsors, as it has now been for many years, the Devī *Pyākham* is performed annually in the night of Kāyāṣṭmī (September). While the spectacle itself has thus been reduced to only one night per year, the ritual and social organisations that surround the dances and constitute the foundation of their divine nature remain relatively untouched; the complexity of the invisible domain by far surpasses its highlight, the spectacular show itself.

Ritual preparation and elaboration are features not confined to the Devī *Pyākham* of Sankhu. All divine dances of the valley start with the worship of Nāsaḥ dyo, the god of music, dance and drama. The Sankhu Devī dances derive their ritual complexity from their multi-caste participation, the elaborate ceremonies (in principle once every five years) at the time of the instruction and inauguration of a new dancing team, and the diversification of functions pertaining to different aspects of the performance. There are *nāyos* (elders, teachers) for all the different elements in the *pyākham*: the movements and gestures of the dancers (Devī *nāyo*), the ritual observances required (*mū nāyo*), the rhythms of the drums (*khiṃ nāyo*), the accompanying songs (*me nāyo*) and the beating of cymbals (*tāḥ nāyo*).

A Buddhist (Vajrācārya) *guruju* officiates at the moments of transition: the worship and sacrifice to Nāsaḥ dyo preceding every dance, the possession of wings from the crown of the town's principal goddess Vajrayoginī to be (temporarily) attached to the crowns of the dancers, and finally, giving spells that provide power to the divine dancers and protect them from the evil eye. A major transition is the sanctification of a new group of dancers, which requires several *pūjā* to Vajrayoginī and Nāsaḥ dyo; the transfer ("drawing") of the latter (the god of music and dance) to the house of instruction (*ākhāḥ chem*), and, at the conclusion of the period of instruction, three nights in succession when the dancers come out and circumambulate the town.

The mystery and power of the divine dances are contained in all those ritual aspects, which overshadow the dramatic performance and at the same time represent a more hidden level of meaning in Sankhu's Devī *Pyākham*.

## History and myth

The Kathmandu Valley is the country's centre of art and architecture, dance and drama, religion and culture. This was especially so in the time of Malla rule, from the 14th to 17th centuries. Several Malla kings themselves not only wrote songs, poetry and drama, but also staged dance and drama and played different roles (characters) themselves.<sup>1</sup> Gopālarājavamsāvalī, the oldest written chronicle of Nepal dating back to the 14th century, the Newar word for dance and drama, *pyākham*, is mentioned in many places (Vajrācārya & Malla 1985:148, 159, 162-164), which shows the rich tradition of dance and drama in those days. In Newar the word *pyākham* is used for both dance and drama. But the tradition of *pyākham*, which is based on the stories of gods and goddesses, consists mostly of dance and ballads. The Devī *pyākham* of Kathmandu and the Devī *pyākham* of Sankhu developed in that tradition. It is difficult to say when exactly the Devī *pyākham* in Sankhu started, because there is no written document available to trace the history except for two small manuscripts, one of which was copied in 1856 and the other in 1863. The first one contains ritual instructions for the Vajrācārya priest and the second contains hymns, which are sung in the dance. The assembly of organisers, the *guthi* of the Devī dance carries out the dance training. It is done orally, as no instructional text is used. The *guthi* members have been continued this tradition since their forefathers' times, as told by the dance teacher Mr. Hirakaji Shrestha.

Worshipping the mother goddess is an old tradition in Hindu society. The Sankhu Devī *pyākham* is based completely on songs of praise to the goddess Devī in the powerful forms of Kālī, Durgā, Bhavānī and Bhagavatī. For the people of Sankhu it is Vajrayoginī Hyāumkhvāḥ māju (Red-faced mother) or Mhāsukhvāḥ māju (Yellow-faced mother) who may have the forms of Kālikā, Durgā, Bhavānī, Bhagavatī or Devī. The Red-faced mother is the main statue of Vajrayoginī, which never comes out of the temple, but the Yellow-faced one is the *yātrā mūrti* of Vajrayoginī, which is carried down to Sankhu town every year in March/April in the Vajrayoginī festival. Both are called Vajrayoginī, but iconographically the two are quite different. Originally she was a goddess of the Buddhists, but now the Hindus also worship her equal respect. In his book *History of Nepal*, Daniel Wright has indicated the Hinduisation of the goddess Vajrayoginī (1877:35). For the people of Sankhu, Devī *Pyākham* is the dance of Vajrayoginī, in which she took the form of three dancers: Devī, Caṇḍī and Bhairava.



The music teacher, Krishna Shrestha, said that long, long ago a great tantrist found the goddess Vajrayoginī dancing in a courtyard in Calākhu quarter of Sankhu, disguising herself as three children. As the tantrist was certain that the dancing children were none other than the goddess Vajrayoginī, he bound them with his magic spells (*tāraṃ taye*) and made them swear to perform the dance every year in Sankhu. Since that time the Devī Dance of Sankhu has been performed in Sankhu.

According to the *mū nāyo* (the chief or the main leader of the dance assembly), Devī Vajrayoginī is fierce, as well as tender and merciful. If she is made angry she can bring great destruction, and if she is pleased she can bestow life and happiness. Masks, ornaments, dresses of Devī dancers, and musical instruments are kept in the *mū nāyo*'s house. Every evening his wife has to light a wick in that room. Sometimes when she forgets to do so, she had to face fearful dreams or heard a frightening sound of jingling bracelets of Devī from the storeroom.

One of the two-sided drum (*khim*) players, Kedar Narayan Ranjit, said that many years ago, when he was very young, the Devī dance was not performed during one year. In that particular year a flock of monkeys from the Vajrayoginī forest kept hanging around Sankhu town to alert the dance assembly to perform the dance. Later, when the dance had been performed, they suddenly disappeared. He said that just a few years back too, when it was becoming late to train the present team of dancers, his wife and his neighbours saw the three dancers dancing on the roof of the *mū nāyo*'s house. They understood that this to be sign of not to delay the training of new dancers.

In relation to the divine power of Devī, almost all *guthi* members whom we interviewed also repeated the story of the instant death of a Daitya dancer of the Kathmandu Devī *pyākham* team when the Sankhu team visited the Kathmandu court.

When we go through the Hindu myth of Devī, we encounter numerous names for her, such as Durgā, Kālī, Cāmuṇḍā, Mahiṣāsura Mardinī, “The slayer of the buffalo demon,” and Umā or Pārvaṭī, as the wife of Siva.<sup>2</sup> The accompanying songs in the Sankhu Devī *pyākham* are all descriptions of the various forms of the goddess Kālī, praising the slaying of various demon enemies.

## Songs and music

In the instruction text of the Vajrācārya priest, it is clearly stated that no songs other than *mālaśrī* (a song sung during the Daśain festival in the praise of Kālī) can be used in the Devī *pyākham*. In his book *Songs of*

*Nepāl*, Siegfried Lienhard has collected one such song (1974:131). In the Sankhu Devī *pyākham* eighteen such songs are sung to accompany the dances. In all songs, except the last one, Devī, Kālī, or Bhagavatī is praised in her different names, forms, and actions for killing various demon opponents. Her beauty and the wearing of different ornaments are also described in those songs. She is praised as the queen of the three worlds. In one of the songs the nature of Vajrayoginī in her fierce form is described ultimately as Kālī. Only in the last song, which is called *ārati* (the song which is sung at the end or at the beginning of dances), are many other Hindu deities mentioned.

The three dancers - Devī, Caṇḍī, and Bhairava - dance in the same songs and perform the same movements. There are no sequence in the dances and songs in the Sankhu Devī *pyākham*, unlike in the Kathmandu Devī *pyākham*, where dances are presented one after another in their sequence.

Besides the three divine dancers, three more dancers - Khyāḥ (a furry creature), Kavaṃ (a skeleton) and Betā (a gentle demon) - performs dances in the Devī *pyākham*. Their dances are performed to entertain the public. In the Kathmandu Devī *pyākham* their dances fit into the sequence in which the divine dancers Devī (who is also called Kumārī in Kathmandu), Caṇḍī and Bhairava are the main characters. Sometimes they dance together, but in Sankhu Khyāḥ, Kavaṃ and Betā are (somehow) separated from the divine dances. They (can) perform humorous dance sketches between the divine dances without any sequence. Separately, six songs are sung when performing Khyāḥ *pyākham* in the Sankhu Devī Dance.

To accompany those songs, *khiṃ*, *dhā*, and *nāykhim* (different kinds of two headed drums), *tāḥ*, *chusyāḥ*, *babhū* (different kinds of cymbals), and *mvahāliṃ* are played. Which instruments are played depends on the songs. In the Kathmandu Devī dance, altogether ten episodes from dances are performed, including the *dyo lhāyegu* (music or melody dedicated to paying respect to the shrines of local gods/goddesses).

### **Masks, dresses, and ornaments**

Local Citrakār, the painter caste in the Newar society makes Devī, Caṇḍī, and Bhairava's masks in Sankhu. They are made of papier-mâché. Once made, it is unnecessary to change the masks until they are broken. But every year a Citrakāra should repaint the masks, a tradition which also stopped a few years ago. The *guthi* no longer received money to remunerate the Citrakār. The *guthi*'s main leader said that the masks

would now be given for painting only if their colour fades. Devī and Caṇḍī's masks are almost similar and are red in colour, while Bhairava's mask is black. Only these masks are used in public performances. In addition to these, there are three copper masks that are very secret and used only in the training period of new dances.

Devī and Caṇḍī wear a red blouse and red *jāmā* (a long skirt), and Bhairava wears a black blouse and black *jāmā*. The dancers also wear various ornaments. On their heads they wear a *matu* (a divine crown), to which silver wings are attached (*kikimpā*), and around their necks they wear various metal necklaces. They wear several decorated bracelets around their arms. They also wear anklets below their knees and these make a jingling sound when they dance.

### The composition of the *guthi*

Newar society is strongly associated with various *guthi* (associations). But unlike the *sī guthi* and *sanā guthi* (funeral associations), other religious associations are not always caste-bound. Sankhu's Devī *pyākham guthi* falls into the second category. Previously this *guthi* consisted of only nine members, but nowadays the composition of the *guthi* has changed considerably. Many people from different castes living in the Calākhu quarter are considered to be members of this *guthi*. Nevertheless, the organisational responsibility is taken by the five *nāyo*?, the leaders of the *guthi*, who all belong to the Shrestha caste. However, in singing songs and playing instruments, several other castes are included in the association. According to the then *khim nāyo*, the late Shyam Krishna Shrestha, those who bring a plate with materials for worship for Nāsaḥ dyo in the morning of Kāyāṣṭmī (the day for performing the dance) are considered the members of the association. The Jyāpu (farmer caste) who sing songs and play instruments, the Jogi who play *mvahālīm* (a kind of pipe), the Nau (the barber) who cuts toe nails and shaves the dancers' head, and the Pūm or Citrakār who paint masks, all bring a plate of offering (*pūjā*) on that morning. All are considered *guthi* members of the Devī *pyākham*. Generally impure castes like the Jogī are never considered *guthi* members in other cases. In this sense the Sankhu Devī *pyākham* is a unique *guthi*.

The distribution of *sī* (parts of the head of the sacrificed animal) is one of the essential elements of Newar feasts in which an animal is sacrificed to any god or goddess, either within a family or during a feast in an association. In the Devī dance association, a goat is sacrificed on the day when the dance is performed, and head is divided into eight parts as *sī*.



Plate 60 Devī, Bhairava and Caṇḍī dancers before wearing their masks (September 1993).



Plate 61 The Devī dancers, the manifestation of the goddess Vajrayoginī in the form of Devī, Bhairava and Caṇḍī (September 1993).

In the instructional text for the Vajrācārya priest it is said that one must give the main *sī* - the right eye - to the dance teacher (Devī *nāyo*), but in practice it is given to the *mū nāyo*, the main leader of the *guthi*. The left eye is given to the Bhairava dancer, the right ear to the Devī dancer, the left ear to the Caṇḍī dancer, the tongue to the Devī *nāyo*, the right jaw to the song teacher (*me nāyo*), left jaw to the *khim nāyo* and the nose to the Vajrācārya priest who officiates at all the ritual proceedings in the Devī *pyākham*.

### Selection of new dancers

In principle, every five years new dancers should be introduced, but in practice this has never happened. Only once in twelve or fifteen years are new dancers trained. This is due to financial constraints. Training a new team of dancers is expensive, and there are no means of meeting the costs except from among the *guthi* members themselves, who must share in the expenses. In selecting new dancers mostly young boys are chosen, so that they can continue to dance for many years. In addition, the main leader of the dance says young boys are obedient and reliable and quick in learning to dance, and as dance characters youngsters look more beautiful and attractive. Surprisingly enough, in none of the divine dances of the Kathmandu Valley, including Sankhu's Devī, are girls recruited as dance characters, even though the female deities are pre-eminent.

In the case of the Khyāḥ, Kavaṃ and Betā there is no caste boundary, but for the Bhairava, Devī and Caṇḍī dancers, one must be from the Shrestha caste. New dancers are preferably chosen from among those families from which old dancers come. If the dancers are not found in those families, an opportunity is given to boys of the other members of the Devī dance association. Only if eligible boys are not found among the association members, are boys from outside the association then invited, but still not from outside Sankhu town.

The dancers in Sankhu's Devī dance are not paid, either by government authorities or by the dance association. However, they do not face the same risks and obligations, as for example, in the Kathmandu Daitya and Kumār dancers. In the latter case, failure to fulfil the rules and regulations can make the dancers suffer seriously (Van den Hoek & Shrestha 1992b:196).

The training of new dancers requires that an astrologer approve the boys. Horoscopes of the novices are given to the astrologer for study. If he does not approve someone's horoscope, then that person cannot be selected to dance. Five years ago, when this batch of dancers was about to

start training, the astrologer disapproved one boy. According to the *mū nāyo*, the main leader, this rule is very strict in case of Bhairava and Devī dancers, but less strict in case of the Caṇḍī dancer. As the main leader remembers, when he was very young a boy was made Devī dancer despite the astrologer's disapproval. The boy died after his first year of performances. The present Devī dancer is the main leader's son. He was only ten when he was selected. He said he never felt possessed by the deity during his dance, but has to keep shivering as if he were possessed. Local people worship the masked dancers as divinities, but such respect is given only on the single night when they perform the dance.

The Sankhu Devī dancers are not particularly proud of their divine roles, as the former Devī dancer (who is at present *khim nāyo*) in the Sankhu Devī dance told me. They had to perform the dance continuously for fifteen years, and this was altogether tedious.

### Training of the dancers

During the dance training, the initiates must pass four phases:

1. The transfer of Nāsaḥ dyo (the god of dance and music) to the house of instruction and the beginning of training;
2. Bā pūjā: second act of sacrificial worship at the Nāsaḥ dyo Shrine when the dancers are about halfway through exercising the dance actions;
3. Sila taye khākegu pūjā: another act of sacrificial worship in the Nāsaḥ dyo shrine, for the dancers to fall in the trance; and
4. Pidanigu: the first of the performances held over a period of three days.

### The transfer of Nāsaḥ dyo

An astrologer fixes this day. On this day, secret night worship is performed in a local Nāsaḥ dyo shrine located in the Dhumlā quarter. This time the worship of Nāsaḥ dyo is performed with a goat sacrifice.

To start the worship each dancer has to offer ten betel nuts (*gvay*) and a coin (*dām*) to Nāsaḥ dyo. This process is called *gvay dām tayegu*.<sup>3</sup> For the Newars (of Nepal) the *gvay dām tayegu* is a ritual announcement of a later larger ceremony. Then the Vajrācārya priest starts worshipping Nāsaḥ dyo and prepares *mohanī* (soot collected from an oil lamp). This *mohanī* is of great importance for the trainees.



Plate 62 Dancing deities: Devī, Bhairav and Caṇḍī with sword in their hands in the mood of slaying demons (September 1993).



Plate 63 Musician and singers during the Devī dances (September 1993).

From this day on they must mark their foreheads with it every day before practising their dance, until the day before their first public performance. They are prohibited from taking any *mohanī* from elsewhere till the day of their first performance (*pidanigu*), and they need not mourn if anybody in their family dies during that period.

After worship and sacrifice they go back to the house where the training of the dancers takes place (*ākhāḥ chem*). Nowadays it is in the *mū nāyo*'s house, where all the things relating to the Devī *pyākham* are kept. The priest has to purify the earth in the training room immediately after the dancers arrive there. He also has to bind 21 grains of husked rice (*ākhe*) four times in four small pieces of cloth and place these in the four directions of the room. Finally, he has to put spiritual imaginary fences for protection against the evil spirits in all four directions of the room. All apprentice boys must present ten betel nuts and a coin (*dām*) to the dance teacher (Devī *nāyo*), and they have to bow before him and request that he teach them the dance well. Then they begin the dance practice holding a wooden sword in their hands, but without any masks or special dresses.

There is no cloth painted with the sign of Nāsaḥ dyo (*Nāsaḥ kāpah*) used in Sankhu for transferring Nāsaḥ dyo. This is frequently used in Kathmandu, as in case of the Daitya and Kumār dance and other divine dances. The Vajrācārya priest said that to transfer Nāsaḥ dyo he has to bind in a piece of cloth three *kisli*, which are offered to Nāsaḥ dyo by the dancers and contain betel nuts and coins. These are taken to the training room, where they are put in a niche. The priest did not mention any *kalaśa* (earthen pot), but the householder, the *mū nāyo*, said that only one *kisli* is put on the mouth of a *kalaśa*, and this they call Nāsaḥ dyo. It is brought home after having received worship at the Nāsaḥ dyo shrine, then is placed in a wall niche in the training room. When the training finishes, the *kalaśa* remains in his home, but without having any importance. When the training is completed, the *kisli* on top of the *kalaśa* is brought to the Vajrācārya priest.

According to the teachers, in the first period of training the dancers are taught to take hold of the drumbeat. In this period the beats are taught orally only. As soon as they have learned the beats, the date for Bā pūjā is fixed.

## Bā pūjā

This pūjā is also done secretly in the night in the local Nāsaḥ dyo shrine with a goat sacrifice. Then the dancers return to the *mū nāyo*'s home, and after a feast, the training resumes. From now on the *khim* drum is



introduced in dance training and the dancers have to practice playing the drum.

One common phenomenon among different castes of the Newar community is their belief that, to please Nāsaḥ dyo and to learn dance and music fast, they need to steal animals. This belief is still found in the Sankhu Devī dance group. If a dancer is unable to steal any animal during the time of training, he becomes very slow at learning, but if a dancer is able to steal an animal, he will become a graceful dancer, singer or instrument player and be successful in whatever art he is learning. In the course of training the trainees can steal any male or female animals for sacrifice, these they can sacrifice to Nāsaḥ dyo in the training room (*ākhāh*). *Sī* are also distributed from those stolen animals, but no meat is allowed to carry away from the training room. Even women who are in the household are not supposed to eat any meat from these sacrificed animals. However, a former Devī dancer, said that he never stole animals yet he learned the dance in a month. During the training time his other friends did steal animals, from which he said he ate his share.

### **Sila taye khākegu pūjā or Trance of the dancers**

In the ritual instruction text of the Vajrācārya priest, it is said that this *pūjā* should be done 21 days before the first performance of the new dancers. Again a goat is sacrificed in the Nāsaḥ dyo shrine. This time the copper masks, iron swords, anklet with string of small bells (*ghaṃghalā*) and dancers bowls (*pātra*) are also worshipped. The priest has to blow spells on all those attributes of the dancers, and he has to dry them in the smoke of *gumgū*, a kind of incense. Then he has to hand over the masks, ankle bracelets, swords and bowls to the dancers.

If possible the priest has to make the dancers shiver (*khākegu*) one by one, blowing spells 21 times on each of them. Whether they shiver or not, they continue to practise every day. Within seven days, the dancers shiver automatically. If they fail to shiver within seven days, they have to make small offering to Nāsaḥ dyo with *samaybaji*, which contains beaten rice, black soya beans, ginger, burned meat and liquor<sup>4</sup> and the sacrifice of a duck's egg. Together with these items they must take 21 *dāphvaḥsvām* (a kind of scentless white jasmine but in the ritual replaceable by a silver imitation) to the Nāsaḥ dyo shrine. First they have to offer those to Nāsaḥ dyo and bring nine of them back home.

At home (in the training room) the priest should attach three *dāphvaḥsvām* to each one's head and try to make them shiver. If things still do not improve with similar rituals and *pūjā*, the instruction is to take

twenty-one grains of husked rice (*ākhe*) to Nāsaḥ dyo and after *pūjā* bring back nine grains and then attach three grains on each dancer's head. It is said in the instruction text that this time the dancers will definitely shiver.



Plate 64 A Vajrācārya priest blowing a mantra to the Devī dancer (September 1993).

The process of making the dancers shiver is one of the most important features in the Sankhu Devī dance by which the audience recognize them as possessed by the divinities. When the dancers come out they are distinct

from human beings not only because of their masks and dresses but also because they are in a trance. This is a sign of their divine power.

### **Pidanigu or the first performances of the dancers**

After the dancers have learned the dancing perfectly, the *pidanigu* day is confirmed. On this day, the *guthi* must perform the *pañcabalī pūjā* (worship with the sacrifice of five animals: a buffalo, goat, ram, duck and cock) at the local Nasaḥ dyo shrine. The assembly must also do *pūjā* at the local Gaṇeśa as well as at the Vajrayoginī shrine and at Mahākāla below the Vajrayoginī temple. In the text they are instructed to make a goat sacrifice at Mahākāla as well. Mahākāla is also called Bhairava and is well known by that name only, but in the *piṭha pūjā* vidhi text the shrine is called Mahālakṣmī. Vajrayoginī does not accept blood in her temple, but animals to be sacrificed in Mahākāla are consecrated in her name, sometimes in front of the main gate of her temple (mostly by non-Newar people from outside Sankhu). But sacrifices are carried out only at the Mahākāla shrine. The *pañcabalī pūjā* at the Nāsaḥ dyo shrine is performed some time in the morning. *Mohanī* is made, and masks, ankle bracelets, swords and *pātra* are set up for worship. Furthermore all musical instruments are set up for receiving worship together with Nāsaḥ dyo. Three *thāpiṃ* (items for worship, mostly a pot containing liquor) are also placed there to hand over to the three dancers later.

Finally, flowers for worship are taken from the statue of the Nāsaḥ dyo, and the masks, ankle bracelets, swords and bowls are handed over to the dancers together with the flowers. They take them into the training house.

After the *sikāḥbhvay* (a feast at which the parts of sacrificial animals' heads are distributed) in the evening the dancers are made ready to go out for their first public performance. Before they go out the priest has to blow the spells to make the dancers shiver, and he has to put a fence against evil spirits around them.

The Devī dancers in Sankhu have to perform their first dance on a Dhomlā stage (*dabū*). The stage is supposed to be the stage of Vajrayoginī and the dance itself is believed to be her dance. Then they return to the Calākhu quarter and begin their dance in front of Ajimā dyo, who is believed to be the mother of Vajrayoginī. After that, they present dances on the Calākhu stage and tour the town, performing dances in all the town's quarters and stages. After continuously presenting dances for three nights, the *pidanigu* ceremony ends. After the *pidanigu* ceremony, there is a rest for them until Kāyāṣṭmī.

Every year on the night of Kāyāṣṭmī the dancers march around Sankhu town performing dances in all the eight quarters. In other years they start their dance from the Calākhu quarter in front of Ajimā dyo. When going around the town the dancers have to dance in a *dyo lhāyegu* gesture in front of all the divinities on the route. As the *khiṃ nāyo* said, they have to perform the *dyo lhāyegu* dance more than a hundred times while making a round of the town. But it is a short act, with a repetition of the same movements each time.



Plate 65 Devotees worshipping the dancers (September 1993).

During the training period Vajrayoginī is worshipped simultaneously with Nāsaḥ dyo. On the day of the Kāyāṣṭmī dance performance, three pieces of *kikimpā*, wings from the crown of Vajrayoginī, are brought to attach onto each dancer's crown. A Vajrācārya priest does the bringing of the wings from the temple and attaching the wings onto the dancers. The attachment of wings is also considered to transfer the divine power of Vajrayoginī to the dancers.

## Conclusion

The Devī dancers are praised in many ways for killing demon antagonists, but surprisingly none of the demon characters are staged in the dance performances in Sankhu. The dance association members said that this is because her divine power could really kill the demon character if it were

staged. Therefore it can be said that the demon character is excluded to avoid an unfortunate death of the performer.

In the Kathmandu Devī dance, the demon is slain by Devī, as Bhairava was unable to kill him. But Caṇḍī has nothing to do with the slaying of the demon. In the case of the Sankhu Devī dance, all three dancers dance with the same songs, to the same musical beat and with the same movements. All of them strike their swords on the ground as a gesture of killing demons.

Unlike the mother goddess (*mātrkā*) temples in the valley, where fierce forms of Devī and Kālī are invoked and animals are sacrificed, blood is totally forbidden in the temple of Vajrayoginī. Only in the secret worship does Vajrayoginī accept cooked meat and cooked duck eggs from the hands of Vajrācārya priests. The manifestation of the Devī dance of Sankhu Vajrayoginī, who is none other than Kālī or Durgā as the accompanying songs describe, might also be seen as part of a process of the Hinduisation of Vajrayoginī

In contrast with other divine dances of the Valley where sacrificing animals and drinking blood by the masked dancers is a common feature, this is not so in the case of the Devī dances in Sankhu. At the time of performing dances, the actors are not supposed to kill any animals or drink blood. Only in worshipping Nāsaḥ dyo do they sacrifice animals. By making several offerings and sacrifices to Nāsaḥ dyo, the dancers obtain their divine power and are called Devī, Caṇḍī and Bhairava. However, their power does not come from those deities, but from Nāsaḥ dyo.

In the other dances of the valley too, whether the Daitya and Kumār dances of Kathmandu or the Navadurgā dance of Bhaktapur and other divine dances, their sources of power and divinity are always drawn from the god Nāsaḥ dyo.

Nāsaḥ dyo, the god of music and dance, embodies the power to transmit divine power from the divinities into the human actors. The female characters may be considered the most powerful, as they slay the demon enemy. But in the practice of the dance performances, the indigenous Newar god Nāsaḥ dyo transfers divine power onto both male and female characters. The agency to bring about this transfer is, as we have seen, the act of sacrificing before the dance and during the training of the dancers.

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### CONCLUSION: CONTINUITY AND CHANGE IN THE TOWN OF SANKHU

#### Summary

The main objective of this monograph has been to present a detailed view of Newar society, its socio-economic, socio-religious, and ritual aspects, concentrating on a single Newar town, Sankhu. I have provided ethnographic details of Sankhu from the viewpoint of religions and rituals that are practiced by its inhabitants. My study shows that Sankhu is a ritual universe in its own right, having ceremonial rather than socio-economically defined features, interacting with its surroundings, the Kathmandu Valley. The beliefs and practices of both the Hindu and Buddhist religions are so strong that castes (*jāt*) and the socio-religious associations (*guthi*) will continue to be of socio-religious importance, despite the worsening economic and political circumstances in Nepal as a whole.

This conclusion has been reached by means of intensive fieldwork and participant observation of fasts, feasts, festivals, processions of the gods and goddesses of the town of Sankhu, as well as by in-depth interviews with specialists, an analysis of published and unpublished ritual texts, inscriptions, colophons, an extensive socio-graphic survey, and the use of video-recordings.

The main subjects treated in this monograph are the ritual calendars (Chapter 2) Newar society and culture (Chapter 3), the mythical and historical account of the town (Chapter 4) topographical features of the town of Sankhu (Chapter 5), its socio-economic aspects (Chapter 6), its castes (*jāt*), caste-bound duties and religious affiliations (Chapter 7) funeral associations (*sī guthi*) (Chapter 8), the socio-religious associations (*guthi*) that are active in the town's ritual life (Chapter 9), and the festivals celebrated in Sankhu (Chapter 10). The festival of Svanti (Chapter 11) and fasts of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa (Chapter 12) and the festival and procession of

the goddess Vajrayoginī (Chapter 13) have received special attention because they are unique to Sankhu. The major focus of this study was on Vajrayoginī; the rituals performed at her temple (Chapter 14), and her festival and dances (Chapter 15). It becomes apparent that the goddess is important for the cultural identity of the town.

### **Sankhu as a ritual universe**

The story of Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna (Chapter 4) shows that the town of Sankhu was created mythically according to the wishes and instructions of the goddess, Vajrayoginī. During the annual festival of the goddess people re-enact this creation. The close association with the religious and the mythical on the one hand, and the physical in which both religion and myth are expressed on the other hand, makes Sankhu a religious, mythical and ritual unity, a meaningful spatial whole; a ritual universe.

All public rituals enacted in Sankhu sanctify the town and give it a spatial significance. In this way, in Sankhu, ritual and space are intimately and meaningfully linked.

In daily life, the distinction between the purely physical and environmental on the one hand, and the cosmological on the other hand, tends to fade the spheres and then more or less coincide. During the festivals, in particular the Vajrayoginī festival, the overlap of spheres is strongest and the inhabitants of Sankhu feel that the mundane and supernatural become one. Even in the social and economic activities the cosmological is never absent not only in a moral or abstract sense but also in the sense of direct manifestations of a goddess who is close by and who is actively monitoring her devotees' lives and fates. It should be even more of a surprise that in the political history of the town the same merger has taken place, and that the mythical and the historical first inhabitants coincide in the divine Śaṃkhadeva, created by the goddess Vajrayoginī herself.

In this respect, Śaṃkhadeva can be considered as her human incarnation, created to rule the country she ordered to be created. To consider kings as incarnations of gods or goddesses is still prevalent among the religious people in Asia. As a king, Śaṃkhadeva was possessed with divine power. With his divine power he can be considered the mediator between people and the goddess. This extraordinary power gave him the legitimacy to rule her territory and its people. As the myth states, once a year the goddess grant him a public audience during her festival in the town. This tradition continues to this day in Sankhu; to represent the reigning king, a royal sword has to be presented every year during her

festival (Chapter 14). This is to pay respect to the goddess for the ruling king. As inscriptional evidence and chronicles show, down from the Licchavī period to the Thakurī, Malla and Shah periods, the goddess Vajrayoginī has received royal patronage. Several acts of worship, sacrifices of goats and offerings of new dresses to all the deities in the temple of Vajrayoginī as well as to the processional statues are carried out on behalf of the king every year. Several royal (*rāj*) *guthi* were installed to carry out the daily and occasional worship and offerings at the temple. Although many such *guthi* have disappeared, several are still functioning in order to provide continuity to ritual activities related to the goddess. It can be claimed that, as the chief patron (*vajamāna*) of the goddess, the role of the reigning king of Nepal is very important. This makes clear that the goddess Vajrayoginī is not only the patron goddess of the town of Sankhu, but also important as the protector of the reigning king of the kingdom of Nepal as a whole.

In Nepal, various *mandala* towns exist (cf. Gutschow & Bajracarya 1977). These are more than purely symbolic pictures but contain recognizable elements of the urban space. The question is whether town planning has followed a classical *mandala*-model, or whether the actual layout of the town has to be ascribed to divine planning of the goddess Vajrayoginī. The two modes of ordering space reinforce each other and both represent aspects of the ritual universe of the town. It may be worthwhile recapitulating the elements given by the legend Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna, which so precisely represents Sankhu's spatial reality. According to the text, the construction of the town was conducted according to the exact instructions of the goddess: the merging of seven villages and the shaping of the town in the form of a conch-shell, the creation of four gates in four directions for four different purposes, and the construction of water channels through the town, with roads in all directions (Chapter 5).

The Maṇiśaila Mahāvadāna also mentions the religious symbols added to the town by creating twelve confluences (*tīrtha*), nine ponds (*kuṇḍal*), nine monasteries (*bāhāḥ*), eight mother goddesses (*mātrkā*) inside the town and eight outside the town. Among both Hindus and Buddhists of South and Southeast Asia, it is not uncommon to construct a city according to an ideal model, reflecting their religious beliefs.<sup>1</sup> Interpretations may vary from place to place. Even finding different opinions regarding a single place is not surprising. As we mentioned above, the town of Sankhu was constructed in the shape of a conch, an object that is carried by the Hindu god Viṣṇu. This view certainly comes naturally to the Vaiṣṇav sect of Hindus. For the Buddhists, however, Sankhu follows the *mandala* model (Chapters 2 and 3). In this respect, the eight shrines of mother goddesses



(*matṛkā*) outside the town and inside the town are important, including the eight cremation grounds outside the town. To attach a cremation ground to each of the *matṛkā* locations is one of the essential aspects of the *mandala* model.

The mountain of Maṇicūḍa, which is situated just above the temple complex of Vajrayoginī, is one of the holy mountains in the Valley for both Hindus and Buddhists. Two rivers, which spring from the Maṇicūḍa pond (*kunḍa*), flow to the west and the east of the town and are known as Manamatī and Nārāyaṇī respectively. Both rivers are compared to the most holy river, Ganges, to which they eventually contribute. Not only the people of Sankhu, but also people from faraway places, make pilgrimages to these rivers at different times of the year.

The town itself is also full of religious symbols, with many deities and temples. The Mahādev temple squares of the Sālkha and Dhomlā quarters are filled with images of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Lakṣmī, Sarasvatī, Gaṇeśa, Bhimsen, Hanumān and other deities. Water from the confluence of the Tārātūrtha is channelled to both these places to make them even more holy. Local people take ritual baths every morning and perform ritual food offerings (*śrāddha*) to their ancestors here. Similarly, each of the four main gates of the town possesses a ritual significance: the first to carry the procession of the goddess Vajrayoginī in and out, the second to bring brides into town, the third to give daughters in marriage, and the fourth to take corpses to the cremation grounds. Similarly, there are eight more gates of minor importance, but they do have less significance from a ritual viewpoint. During the festival of Gathāmmugaḥ the ghost gods (*bhu dyo*) are dragged away through these gates. People also offer food to ghosts and spirits outside these gates to pacify them.

The *mandala* structure (Chapters 2, 3 and 7) is continuously confirmed or brought to life during the numerous religious and ritual events, from those at the household and clan-level to those at the ward-level, and from those on the town-level to those extending to the town or even comprising the former kingdom in the Valley of Sankhu. The repeated ritual acts of human beings and divinities are instrumental in maintaining the sacredness of the town, its spatial and hence its social order, and consequently the boundaries of its economic and political orders.

The order of space is maintained in Sankhu town, so that no one can cross one's boundary and encroaches on the space of others; this is how the sacredness of the town is maintained. The division into quarters, the arrangement of human settlement, the construction of houses, the construction of the main roads (*mū lampu* or *pradkṣiṇāpatha*) or byways, temples, monasteries, courtyards, the earlier royal palace, platforms,

crossroads and water channels, each and every thing is considered in order. Hence the town is considered sacred and holy for its inhabitants, as well as for outsiders who may make pilgrimages to this town on many occasions during the year. From a religious point of view, the town of Sankhu is equal to heaven for its people. They believe it is the most sacred place in the world. No matter where they go or what they do, they must keep in touch with this sacred place. To obtain religious bliss, the religious people of Sankhu may make pilgrimages to other holy Hindu or Buddhist shrines in the world, such as Gaya, Banaras, Gangasagar, Jagannath, Badri, Kedar or Rishikesh, although their final destination is none of these places, but their own land where they were born. For them Sankhu is spiritually the centre of the universe.

### **Continuity and change**

In this final Chapter, it is appropriate to discuss briefly some aspects of continuity and change in the town of Sankhu. People in Sankhu follow their ancient culture, rituals and traditions like the people in other Newar settlements. In the celebration of religious feasts, fasts, festivals and processions of gods and goddesses, no interruption or major change with the past can be observed. The older generation is especially determined to maintain all these rituals and preserve the traditions as they are. They believe that such ritual activities should be preserved and continued, not only because these rituals and traditions are important for religion, but also because they originate from and provide the town with its distinct cultural and social identity.

From the family to the community level, people can be seen performing all daily and calendrical rituals. It is necessary for every household to begin its day with the women cleaning up the house early in the morning, collecting holy water and worshipping all the gods and goddesses residing in their own house and in their own quarters. For all the members of a household it is also obligatory to take a ritual bath every morning, to visit the temples and to worship gods and goddesses and to offer food to deities and deceased ancestors before taking their morning meals. All these ritual activities can be considered part and parcel of the daily routine of traditionally minded people in Sankhu. People frown on those who fail to maintain these ritual traditions.

Celebrating the calendrical rituals, such as Dasain, Svanti and all other big and small festivals is equally important for each family in the town. Such religious occasions not only provide the opportunity to please divinities but also to please human beings. During such festivals, along

with worshipping different gods and goddesses, festive meals are prepared to entertain family members and relatives. The festive meals prepared for married daughters, their husbands and children during such festivals deserve special mention. If families fail to observe these religious rituals and social duties, they lose their social prestige, and this also means that they will have to face the wrath of the gods (*bhagavan*).

Similarly, it is very important to perform life cycle rituals for each child born in the town. The ritualisation process begins as soon as a child is born, with the birth purification (*macābu byamkegu*), the name giving, the rice feeding, the handing over of a loincloth to boys, the performance of *ihī*, the ritual marriage and *bārḥātayegu*, the twelve days' confinement of girls in a dark room. For old people who reach the age of 77 years, seven months and seven days, an old age ceremony called *jamko* is observed. Such ceremonies are repeated later when one reaches 83, 88 and 99 with slightly different rituals. Depending upon caste and family, the rituals may be performed in various ways provided that these life cycle rituals are performed. Rich families may perform such rituals in a grand manner by organising lavish feasts for their relatives, friends and neighbours, but if the economic situation does not allow this, one may perform such rituals on a modest scale. However, nobody can escape performing these rituals. The ritualisation of a person's life is important, and neglecting them may bring him or her trouble, which means facing social exclusion from the community. Out of fear of other people's remarks (*dhāi lhāi*), i.e., social control by one's relatives, friends or neighbours, people feel the need to carry out all the rituals for the members of their family.

What has become clear from the present study is that most inhabitants of Sankhu will continue practicing their traditions despite the growing attraction of modernity and globalisation. When one sees the crowd of youngsters enthusiastically carrying heavy palanquins on their shoulders during the festival of Vajrayoginī, or bare-footed youths rolling on the ground in the cold winter during the month-long festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa, crowds of youths participating in the carnivals during the festival of Gunhi punhi, one realises that even the younger generation in town enjoy them. It is not impossible that the personal and communal rituals provide a spiritual refuge for those youngsters who do not succeed in reaping the material fruits of so-called modernity and globalisation. All over the world, globalisation tends to reinforce local identities. The increasing interest of youngsters in their own traditions and their participation in fasts and festivals may well be an expression of a return to one's roots.

However, many collective activities are facing a hard time due to financial constraints. From a practical point of view, the unique capacity of the Newars to maintain temples and the performance of rituals and festivals through *guthi* is at the same time its weakness. As has been discussed, the 1964 land reforms programme had a considerable impact on such *guthi*. The programme abruptly curtailed the income of all *guthi* by empowering tenants who till the land belonging to such *guthi*. As a result of smaller incomes or the loss of income, many *guthi* have had to reduce their activities or abandon them altogether. Especially individually run *guthi* face great danger. State owned *guthi* have also experienced setbacks, but the government has arranged for a certain adaptation through the Guthi Corporation (Guthi Samsthān). In particular, for the activities of big festivals such as Dasain, Mādhav Nārāyaṇa or Vajrayoginī, the Guthi Corporation provides financial support, but even this support is insufficient to maintain them in their present form.

There are other instances of terminating ritual activities because of the lost income, such as the rituals in which ghosts and spirits are fed on the night of Sillācarhe in February and performing Hāleyo Lākhe dances in August.

In the past, religiously minded wealthy people used to sponsor the installation of images of gods and goddesses, to build temples, rest houses (*sataḥ* and *phalcā*) and stone spouts. They also established *guthi* with lavish endowments of land for their maintenance. However, with the loss of income from such lands those *guthi* have disappeared one after another, leaving many public monuments on the verge of collapse. A few of them have been restored, but many are left to fall down. Although many people in Sankhu feel the necessity for preserving such historical monuments, they fail to maintain them because of lack of funds. Most recently, a non-governmental volunteer organisation, Friends of Sankhu (FoS), has been taking a keen interest in preserving historical monuments in and around the town. It completed the restoration of the Mahādev temple and surrounding monuments in 1998, the Vajrayoginī temple in 2000, Sarāvata Sataḥ in 2001 and Datta Phalcā in 2002. This adoption of the task of maintaining public monuments formerly carried out by traditional *guthi* by a newly established NGO such as the FoS can be considered a positive development, which will eventually help make society aware of the importance of maintaining its cultural heritage.

There is also a social reason for the ritual decline. In many instances castes have stopped performing ritual duties. Various caste members found it embarrassing to continue their traditional duties, which will not reward sufficiently. For the past four or five years, the Jogis have also become

selective in accepting Jogibvaḥ, or Nhaynhumā food offered in the name of the deceased. The younger generation urges them to stop such duties. This means that sooner or later the Jogis in Sankhu will stop all their traditional duties, as has happened in other Newar settlements.<sup>2</sup> Until ten to fifteen years ago, the Po were seen begging on the streets of Sankhu, collecting leftovers of feasts from high caste families and collecting food (*pinḍa*) offered to the deceased on the banks of rivers, but they have stopped all these acts. With the rise in the economic status of stigmatised castes, discarding caste-bound duties will continue. In particular people from low castes, from whose hands “drinking water is not accepted” by “pure” or “high” castes, will soon be breaking down the traditional boundaries. The political changes brought about by the 1990 people’s movement and the consequent people’s war launched by the Maoists in 1997 also tend in this direction. These political movements and changes are inciting the members of oppressed castes to liberate themselves from being exploited and to achieve equal status in their society.<sup>3</sup> Sooner or later, awareness brought about by these social and political movements will shake the traditional life of the town.

Education also plays a vital role in this changing society. Each year the number of educated people is increasing in Sankhu. In the past, children from low castes, those castes from whose hands water is not accepted, were hardly seen attending schools, but nowadays an increasing number of these children have begun to attend school. Similarly, well- to-do families are now more inclined to send their children to so-called English-medium boarding schools. Access to modern education affects traditional ways of life in the town to a great extent. Youngsters who return from modern schools are more attracted by Western pop and disco culture than by their ancient traditional culture. Most recently, modern media such as the Internet and television have caused a greater exposure of educated young people to outside influences than ever before. This will also have a great impact on the traditional life of the town.

Economic changes taking place in the country as a whole will certainly influence the people of Sankhu too. Although Sankhu has seen great economic setbacks because of the loss of its trade route to Tibet since the late 1950s, it has managed to sustain its importance as a business town until today. Fostering wholesale and retail shops in town can be taken as an example. The younger educated generation, who failed to obtain employment in governmental or non-governmental jobs, employ themselves by opening small-scale wholesale or retail shops in Sankhu. The surrounding villages provide a good number of customers to these shops. It is hoped that once Sankhu has been linked to Phakteśvar and

Sindhupālcok by a motor road it will be able to regain its past glory as a business centre. But the fact remains that the recently educated generation in Sankhu is increasingly turning towards greater Kathmandu to find opportunities for business and employment, instead of sticking to traditional occupations and agriculture.

Recently, however, the attraction of the capital Kathmandu has somehow diminished because of the rising prices of housing, a scarcity of land, increasing pollution and the scarcity of drinking water. For these reasons, the people of Sankhu are now inclined to remain in Sankhu. Increasing numbers of immigrants from all over the country are creating a great scarcity of space in the Kathmandu Valley. In less than ten years' time residential areas have expanded beyond the river Bāgmatī heading in the direction of Sankhu. Looking at the present trend in housing construction along the road to Kathmandu, Sankhu will be turning into a suburb of greater Kathmandu very soon. Already many people, even from Kathmandu, have begun buying land in and around Sankhu. In the future, because of the influx of many foreigners, the character of Sankhu as a social and hence a religious community may be threatened.

# NOTES

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## Chapter One

<sup>1</sup> Śaka Saṃvat 526. See Vajrācārya (1966:3–4) and Vajrācārya ed. (1999:84–5).

<sup>2</sup> See also Bernard Cohn (1962).

<sup>3</sup> By contrast, it is still considered inauspicious for *reigning* kings of Nepal to visit Sankhu and Vajrayoginī (Vajrācārya and Malla 1985:123).

<sup>4</sup> The story in this medieval chronicle is not confirmed by Mānadeva's famous Cāṃgu nārāyaṇa inscription (AD 464) that commemorates his father.

## Chapter Two

<sup>1</sup> See Slusser (1982:381–91) for a detailed discussion of 'Calendars and Eras' in Nepal. Peter van der Veer (1986:36–43) presents the Indian astrological calendar system in relation to festivals in Ayodhya. See also Fuller (1992:262–6).

<sup>2</sup> Scholars such as Pandey (1951) strongly assert Vikramāditya as a historical figure and founder of the Vikram Era.

## Chapter Three

<sup>1</sup> According to the population census of Nepal 1991, the different ethnic groups no longer maintain their mother tongues. The census reports are criticised, however, by many Nepalese and foreign scholars for not presenting accurate data. See HMG CBS (1993:163–324; 1995:236–311; 1995:26–40). For the criticism on the CBS data by various scholars see Nepal (1991). Shrestha (1999b) points out the example of Suntol VDC of Sankhu, where the CBS data deducts almost half of the Newar speakers' numbers only to them to the count of Nepali speakers.

<sup>2</sup> For more discussions on ethnic nationalism in Nepal, see Fisher (1993); Gellner (1986; 1993; 1997); Malla (1992); Quigley (1987); Shrestha (1999a) and Tamang (1987).

<sup>3</sup> On the basis of comparative verbal morphology, Van Driem (1992 and 1993) proposes a Newar-Kirāt link.

<sup>4</sup> See Turner (1931:353) and Mali (1978:14–18). See Acarya for a different view (1953).

<sup>5</sup> For a detailed discussion of the word *Nepāl* see Malla (1983a:63–9).

<sup>6</sup> See Malla (1983b:57–68). See also Malla (1981:5–23 and 1996:1–9). Witzel (1980:326) also saw the possibility of them being early forms of Newar, however

he preferred to call them “Kirāti”. See Shakya (1998) for Naming of Newar language.

<sup>7</sup> See Giuseppe (1794:241–53), gives eyewitness reports of the barbarous acts of the Gorkhā invaders upon the Newars after their victory over Nepal. Kirkpatrick (1975:380–6) has reprinted extracts from Father Giuseppe’s “Account of Nepal”. However, twentieth century Nepalese historiographers such as B. Acarya, D.R. Regmi and S. Gyawali dismiss such incidents. But Stiller (1989:33–4) argues their rejections are not based on evidence and confirms Giuseppe’s account. See also Pradhan (1991:104–5).

<sup>8</sup> Newar settlements like Dolkha already existed outside the Valley from the early Malla period, but extensive migration of the Newars began after the 1769 Gorkhā conquest. See Gellner (1986:102); Lewis and Sakya (1988:25–65).

<sup>9</sup> In other Indo-European societies too, social stratification was to be found. Oosten has taken three social functions presented by Dumézil in Indo-European society and compared them with first three *varṇas* of ancient India. See Oosten (1985:18).

<sup>10</sup> The Puruṣa Śukta (90.12) provides the oldest evidence of this idea (Dutta 1931:4).

<sup>11</sup> Burghart (1996:35–58) presents a discussion of hierarchical models of the Hindu social system. See also Das (1977).

<sup>12</sup> See Ballhatchet (1999) for the caste concept among the Catholics in India. See also Tharamangalam (1998:263–91).

<sup>13</sup> The notion of caste among the Meo Muslims of Rajasthan is well discussed by Jamous (1997:180–201). Bhatti (1996:244–62) also finds castes among the Muslims similar to Hindus castes. See also Franselow (1997:202–26) and Vatuk (1997:227–62) for different views.

<sup>14</sup> See Bouglé (1971); Hocart (1950); Weber (1948:396–415) and Dumont (1966). Among numerous other publications are Srinivas (1996); Fuller (1997); Das (1977); Parry (1979); Raheja (1988a and 1988b).

<sup>15</sup> See Panta (1964:1–10). Sharma (1997:13–17) also holds this view. See also Regmi (1965). See Greenwold (1975:56–7) for further discussion of the origins of the caste system in Nepal.

<sup>16</sup> Hodgson might have based his lists on the manuscript sources he collected during his years in Nepal. See the Hodgson collected manuscripts at the British Library India Office Collections, Vol. 60, pp. 135–8, 146–50 and Vol. 51, pp. 176–80. See Oldfield (1880:177–188). He presents 68 different castes. Hamilton (1986:31–8) lists several Newar castes.

<sup>17</sup> See Greenwold, (1974a:101–23 and 1978:483–504). He also discusses Newar Buddhist priests, their ritual initiation and Buddhism in Nepal (1974b:129–49).

<sup>18</sup> All Newars were ranked in the Matawali, or alcohol-consuming, category. The category was considered the Śūdra, the lowest among the four *varṇa* of the Hindu society. See P. Sharma (1977:284). Nepali (1987:319–20) presents eight hierarchical levels for all castes and ethnic groups of Nepal.

<sup>19</sup> Hofer (1979:45) provides a ranking order of Newar castes among other Nepalese castes in his study of the 1854 legal code.



<sup>20</sup> They are in charge of the temple of the royal goddess Taleju in Kathmandu.

<sup>21</sup> Macdonald (1975:281–308) presents English translations of the code with his comments on the law made for the lower castes. See also Hofer (1979).

<sup>22</sup> Pertaining to marriage, life-cycle rituals and divorce, the 1854 Legal Code and its later amendments (1936, 1948 and 1952), which were in effect until the 1964 Legal Code was implemented, provide special regulations for different Newar castes (Regmi 1978:21–48).

<sup>23</sup> Gutschov and Kölver say the ranking is from the Rājopādhyāy's viewpoint (1975:56–8).

<sup>24</sup> His list contains 34 castes, but some are no longer to be found. See table XIII in Toffin (1984:231).

<sup>25</sup> See Gellner (1995:17). For his earlier discussion of this subject, see (1992:41–6). See also Nepali (1987:320–1), who also presents six hierarchical levels but considers Duim and Bhā unclean castes.

<sup>26</sup> Sakya (2000) presents an interesting discussion on caste and kinship among the Newars in southern Kathmandu in relation to marriage.

<sup>27</sup> This was a case of a gentleman from a Singh Jyāpu, who passed away in 2000.

<sup>28</sup> See Brinkhaus (1996:137–47), who provides abundant examples from history of when there was no tolerance in Nepal in the matter of religion.

<sup>29</sup> Burghart (1996:261–77) presents an excellent description of the position of modern Hinduism of Nepal.

<sup>30</sup> Many scholars have discussed this subject (e.g. Doherty 1978:434; van Kooij 1978 and Gellner 1996).

<sup>31</sup> See Fürer-Haimendorf 1956:36; Gellner 1996:231–50; Hasrat 1970; Ishii 1983; Levi 1986 (1905); Nepali 1988:191–7 (1965); Pradhan 1986:36–46; Ishii 1997; Regmi 1968 and Vergati 1995:98–130.

<sup>32</sup> Quoting Miller (1956), Doherty (1978:442) compared the Newar *guthi* systems with the *kidus* of the Tibetans.

<sup>33</sup> As Professor Tej Ratna Kansakar told this author. He also disclosed that in his lifetime he knew twelve *guthi* that his grandfather used to participate in, by his father's time these had reduced to six, and nowadays only two of them are still functioning.

<sup>34</sup> A specific sharecropping – the landowner or the state appropriates a specific quantity of the produce or a stated sum in cash as rent.

<sup>35</sup> The Guthi Legislation has been translated into English (Regmi 1976:164–79).

<sup>36</sup> *The Kathmandu Post*, 3 April 2000 (an English daily newspaper).

<sup>37</sup> See Bernier (1979:27). An analytical view of the Newar tradition of constructing urban settlements is to be found in Toffin (1991). See also Ishii (1992:206) and Müller (1981).

<sup>38</sup> In 1993 during the “Mandala Festival” at the Goethe Institute, Kathmandu, Dhanavajra gave a paper on *Nepālamaṇḍala*. See Sharma and Malla (1996:iii).

<sup>39</sup> Analysing various sources, Dutt also quotes Devī Purāṇa to assert this view (1925:84–5).

<sup>40</sup> See Wright (1877:269–70). In Sankhu alone, this records the destruction of 236 houses and 21 temples and rest places (*pāṭīs*), the death of eighteen people and the injury of ten.

<sup>41</sup> See also Vajrācārya and Malla 1985: folios 21, 23, 29, 56, 61 and 63.

<sup>42</sup> Löwdin (1998) presents an extensive study of food and rituals in Newar society.

## Chapter Four

<sup>1</sup> Sankhu was a trade post on the route to Tibet until the 1950s, but it is not close enough to Tibet for it to be referred to in its name.

<sup>2</sup> See Malla (1983b:57–68 and 1996:1–9). Witzel presents interesting and elaborate discussion for the whole Nepal (1993:217–66).

<sup>3</sup> Bhakta Bahadur Nhisutu Shrestha of Sankhu allowed me to photocopy his copy of the Svayambhū Purāṇa, which is, dated AD 1909 (NS 1029). It is written on yellow-coated Nepalese paper in Newar script (see folio 90a).

<sup>4</sup> See Tamot (1991:5–16) and National Archive 8 D 13/14. One of the versions of Svasthānī story is translated into English from Newar by Linda Iltis. See Iltis (1985) and Shrestha (1995b).

<sup>5</sup> See National Archive reel 34 A 344/5.

<sup>6</sup> A similar myth is to be found for the Kashmir Valley. It was once the bed of vast lake and later turned into the kingdom of Kashmir. See Pandit (1953:5, 8–9).

<sup>7</sup> In 1962, the first volume (chapters 1–6, pp. 6–72) was published; the second volume (chapters 7–13, pp. 4–162) was published in 1963. See Vajrācārya (1962 and 1963). In 1999, in the second edition of this book, both parts are combined in one volume (Vajrācārya 1999).

<sup>8</sup> His work (Handurukande 1967) contains 37 pages of introduction, the transliteration of prose sections from seven different Sanskrit manuscripts in part I, their English translation in part II, and the transliteration of the metrical version of the fourth chapter from the Svayambhū Mahāpurāṇa in part III. The Tibetan drama is included as appendix I, with 13 pages of introduction together with the transliteration of the original text and the English translation.

<sup>9</sup> An ancient Indian city, the capital of Emperor Aśoka's realm is today Patna in Bihar.

<sup>10</sup> In Buddhism: Buddha, *dharma* (religion) and *saṃgha* (community) are considered the three jewels.

<sup>11</sup> The goddess is still known by both names: Vajrayoginī and Ugratārā. See also Handurukande (1967:xl).

<sup>12</sup> In Hindu belief the Kaliyuga is the age of destruction, which began five thousands years ago. At present it is the year 5102 Kaligata era.

<sup>13</sup> Mahākāla is god of death, one form of the Hindu god Śiva; as Kṣetrapāla he is considered to be the guardian god of a certain area.

<sup>14</sup> The Vajrācārya priests of Sankhu, who perform priestly tasks in Vajrayoginī temple, still claim to be the descendants of Saint Vācāsiddhi.

<sup>15</sup> These are: Tārā, Pramod, Ratnavatī, Dharmavatī, Vajramatī, Tārāvatī, Guṇavatī, Yogavatī, Śītāvatī, Sāmānyavatī, Jvālāvatī and Pūrnāvatī *tīrtha*. See Vajracarya 1962:38–63.

<sup>16</sup> Dhāraṇī is of a class of Mahāyānic literature composed between the 4th and 8th century AD that refers to *mantra*, *maṇḍala*, *kriyā*, *caryā* etc. (N. Bhattacharyya 1992:221). In MM Dhāraṇī is presented as one of the hymns dedicated to Ugratārā Vajrayoginī (Vajracārya 1962:25).

<sup>17</sup> Vajrayoginī herself is also called Mahāmāyā or great charm (Vajracārya 1962:15). Whether Mahāmāyā Vijaybāhinī Devī is also Vajrayoginī herself or not is not clear.

<sup>18</sup> Of these villages, Nāgacā, Gulimā and Gāgal are still known places around Sankhu.

<sup>19</sup> They are Thathubāhā, Vapibāhā, Yaṃbāhā, Suyabāhā, Kobāhā, Maṃsubāhā, Obāhā, Ducchembāhā and Gubāhā. *Bāhā* or *bahi* are words used to denote Buddhist monasteries in the Newar language, in Sanskrit *vihāra* or *mahāvihāra* are used for monasteries (Vajracārya 1963:14–15).

<sup>20</sup> The eight shrines outside the town are Mahālakṣmī at Mahākāla, Cāmuṇḍā at Dathumālā, Brahmāyaṇī at Śādhūśmaśāna, Raudrāyaṇī at Upaśmaśāna, Vārāhi at Vāṃdol, Indrāyaṇī at Itāguṃ, Kaumārī at Salam Khvāh and Vaiṣṇavī at Ivicā. Guardian goddesses Siṃhiṇī is at Śaraṇakhelaguṃ and Byāghrinī is at the bank of the river to the east of the town. Then inside the town: Kumārī at Ilamṭva, Nīlakālī Cāmuṇḍā outside the gate of Sālkhādhvākā, Nīlabhairav Raudrāyaṇī outside the gate of Sāṃgādhvākā, Vaiṣṇavī at Yaṃbāhā, Māheśvarī at Calākhu quarter, Indrāyaṇī at Yaṃbāhā, Svetabhairav Brāhmāyaṇī at Sālkhā quarter and Gaṇeśa Vārāhi at Bhaudhvākā, Gaṇeśa and Kumār at Gubhāla. For the iconography of the eight mother goddesses see Tachikawa (1986:41–116).

<sup>21</sup> Ratnakūṇḍala, Dharmakūṇḍala, Maṇikūṇḍala, Mānakūṇḍala, Guṇavānakūṇḍala, Pūrṇedukūṇḍala, Sitalākūṇḍala, Tārākūṇḍala and Yogakūṇḍala.

<sup>22</sup> Siddhakula Mahāvihāra, Vajracakra Mahāvihāra, Jñānacakra Mahāvihāra, Dharmadhātu Mahāvihāra, Guṇākara Mahāvihāra, Jayaṇākara Mahāvihāra, Dharmacakra Mahāvihāra, Henākara Mahāvihāra and Kīrti Pūrṇa Mahāvihāra. When these cave monasteries were made is unknown. Cave monasteries existed at Ajanta and Elora in the west of India a few centuries before Christ (Korn 1977:26).

<sup>23</sup> In Sanskrit, “Ekajaṭā” means “the mother goddess with one twist (tail) of hair”. The word “Ekajaṭī” is not found, so possibly it is a corrupt form of “Ekajaṭā”. Ekajaṭā is a form of Tārā whose cult is reported to have been brought to India from Tibet by Siddha Nāgārjuna. See Bahttacharya (1992:238).

<sup>24</sup> For Maṇicūḍa’s story see Lienhard 1963 and Handurukande 1967.

<sup>25</sup> Four other similar *caitya* are found at the Vajrayoginī sanctuary. Alsop (1995) presents a brief discussion of Licchavi *caitya*.

<sup>26</sup> See Mishra (1991) on Nepal-Tibet relations.

<sup>27</sup> This translation is from Regmi (1983a:22). Originally the inscription was in Sanskrit. For Nepali translation and analysis of the inscription see Vajracārya (1973:168, 169). Vajracārya confirms Vāmanadeva as a Licchavi king reigning around AD 538, but he could not trace Vāmanadeva’s lineage precisely. Similarly,

D. Regmi (1983b:75) declared Vāmanadeva as one more ruler in the list of kings of the earlier Licchavi period, but he too was unable to provide his ancestry.

<sup>28</sup> See Regmi 1983a:81, plate CXXIX. For Nepali translation and analysis of the inscription see Vajrācārya (1973:508–10). See also Regmi (1983b:219–20) for his analysis. This inscription is to be found as no. 17 in Lévi (1905–08) and as no. 75 in Gnoli (1956:104).

<sup>29</sup> See Vajrācārya (1973:510). B. Acharya (1998:22), however, assumed present Svayambhū as “Guṃ Vihāra”, the oldest Buddhist monastery in Nepal, but he did not supply any explanation.

<sup>30</sup> Petech, however, lists four Śaṅkaradeva from various periods. He found one more Śaṅkaradeva from a chronicle VK (Vamśāvalī Keshar) AD 943–62 (NS 63–82). See Petech (1958:28–30, 45–7). The Gopālārājavamśāvalī lists only three Śaṅkaradeva, see Vajrācārya and Malla 1985:235–6. See also Regmi (1965:80–112), Hasrat (1970:xxx, xxxiii), Slusser (1982:397–8) and Nepal (1997:24–5, 56–7).

<sup>31</sup> Zanen (1986:134) refers to Toffin (1979:77n32). See also Toffin (1984:35, 202–3). Studying inscriptions, chronicles and documents, Petech confirms that the tradition of *dvairājya* and *ardharājya* existed in Nepal (1958:31, 37–40, 62 and 77).

<sup>32</sup> His analysis was that this was the third Mānadeva (Regmi 1965:86).

<sup>33</sup> See Vajrācārya and Malla (1984:157, folios 54b and 55a); see also Nepal (1997:202).

<sup>34</sup> See Sharma (1994:6–7). Brian H. Hodgson’s collected Nepalese manuscripts (Volume 51:221) at the British Library mention the take over of Sankhu and handed down to a local chief (*Sākhū mārṃyā Gajavāladvārṃyā lāi diyā*), but the note is not clear about the date. See also Hasrat (1970:164)

<sup>35</sup> Functionaries were made responsible for collecting rents from the tenants. What they earned from the land was considered partly their own income, partly payable to the government.

## Chapter Five

<sup>1</sup> The legend presented in the Padmagir’s chronicles describes Śivapurī as Śāṅkhu Mountain with a conch form. See Hasrat (1970:9, 11 and 15). Brown (1912:63) noted the attribution of the conch symbol to Bhatgoan. Such attribution of religious symbols to settlements is common in the whole South Asian region. In Orrisa, people consider four cities: Purī, Bhuvaneśvar, Jāyapur and Konārka as lying in the shape of conch shell (*saṃkha*), wheel (*cakra*) and lotus (*padma*) respectively (Gutschow 1982:181–2).

<sup>2</sup> In 1978 I worked with Zanen, helping him to draw the map of Sankhu published in Zanen (1986) and reproduced, with modifications, in this book.

<sup>3</sup> Outside the town, they are: Mahākāla, Dathumālā, Śādhuśmaśāna, Upaśmaśāna, Vāṃdol, Itāguṃ, Salaṃ *khvāḥ*, Ivicā, Śaraṇakhelaguṃ and the eastern bank of the river of the town. Inside the town they are Iṃlātṃvāḥ quarter, Sālkhādhvākā,

Sāṃgādhvākā, Yambāhā, Calākhū quarter, Vambāhā, Sālkhā quarter and Bhaudhvākā.

<sup>4</sup> Analyzing various sources Dutt also quotes Devī Purāṇa in support of this view (1925:84–5).

<sup>5</sup> Herdick (1985:382) pointed out the structure of twelve gates in Kirtipur, another Newar town in the Kathmandu Valley.

<sup>6</sup> On Newar urban residential quarter organisation for Kirtipur, see Herdick (1985).

<sup>7</sup> In the case of Bhaktapur, Gutschow and Kölver (1975:20) assumed that it developed from two or more villages.

<sup>8</sup> To indicate traditional boundaries of a Newar *tvāḥ* (Nep.: *tol*), I use the word ‘quarter’ and the word “ward” as a political division of a VDC. The boundaries of a ward and quarter do not coincide.

<sup>9</sup> However, eight is not always auspicious. Newar people consider the number eight in a calendar or in age inauspicious.

<sup>10</sup> They are Svāmlā and Phisaḥ in Dhomlā, Kumkvātha and Vāphalcā in Sālkhā, Dhalamko in Calākhū quarter, Dathunani in Dugāhiti quarter, Lāmko, Sāṃgā and Nālāgā in Suṃtol quarter, Talejukvātha, Cakhumkeba and Vasimākva in Ipātvāḥ quarter, Kusicā in Imlā and Kotamcā in Pukhulāchī quarter (see map).

<sup>11</sup> See (Toffin 1979:38 and 1984:39, 53; Zanen 1986:144). For his comparison of Sankhu with other Newar towns see Toffin 1993:180–2.

<sup>12</sup> On 21 October 1999, this author had a long interview with him at his residence in Reading, England, about his experiences as an anthropologist in Sankhu. He also kindly supplied some of the materials he collected during his fieldwork there.

<sup>13</sup> See Toffin (1996a:65–88). Van den Hoek (1993) presents similar characteristics for the city of Kathmandu.

<sup>14</sup> Some scholars claim that the word *bāhā* derived from the Sanskrit word *bhaṭṭāraka* or *bhaṭṭāra*. They speculate that it evolved from *bharāda* to *bharārā* to *bāhāla* then *bāhā*. John Locke, however, dismisses such speculations (1985:479–80).

<sup>15</sup> The remaining eight monasteries are located inside the town. They are Thathubāhā in Svāmlā sub-quarter, Vapibāhā in Sālkhā quarter, Yambāhā in Dugāhiti quarter, Suyabāhā in Lāmko sub-quarter, Kobāhā in Suṃtol quarter, Maṃsubāhā in Pukhulāchī quarter, Ombāhā in Dhomlā quarter and Ducchembāhā in the Mucuka. See Locke (1985:467–70) for his impression about these *bāhā* of Sankhu.

<sup>16</sup> See Korn 1977:58. Karel Rijk van Kooij (1977:39–88) presents a detailed study of the iconography of the woodcarvings in a Newar monastery.

<sup>17</sup> There are many small and big courtyards (*cuka*, *nani*) in Sankhu: Sighvāycuka, Saymicuka, Ipātvā Nāsaḥcuka, Mallicuka, Barecuka, Tulāchicuka and Dvārecuka in the Ipā quarter; Narāṃcuka, Manāchemcuka and Lāykucuka in Inlā quarter; Pukhulāchī Nāsaḥcuka and Nāycuka in Pukhulāchī quarter; Bhujimpucuka, Syārbācuka, Phisaḥcuka, Mucuka, Nyāsicuka, Khyācuka, Dallicuka and Dhomlā Nāsaḥ cuka in Dhomlā quarter; Nanicācuka, Bhagabāncuka, Balampu (*ihī*) *cuka*, Nhubāhānānicuka, Sindhucuka, Kvatamcācuka and Dhalamkvacuka in Calākhū

quarter; Kaṃyapvācuka, Dathunicuka and Ibicāḥcuka in Dugāhiti quarter; and Mikhātagvacuka and Dhāgyācuka in Suṃtol quarter.

<sup>18</sup> See Korn (1977:86–102) for more details on the architecture of several rest houses in the Kathmandu Valley.

<sup>19</sup> In 1997, a local NGO, Friends of Sankhu, restored the Mahādev pond.

<sup>20</sup> The water channel at the Sālkhā Mahādev complex is also known as Sundarighāt.

<sup>21</sup> Epigraphist and historian Dr Diwakar Acharya assumes it as the second half of a pedestal of some Buddhist images. According to him it carries incomplete information. I am indebted to Dr Acharya for providing transcription and translation of the inscription for me.

<sup>22</sup> See Herdick (1987:247–8) who treats *chvāsaḥ* in the context of death rituals in Kīrtipur. He talks about good (*bhīm*) and bad (*mabhiṃ*) *chvāsaḥ*, but in Sankhu such distinction is not to be found. See also Devkota (1984:12–3).

<sup>23</sup> Except for the Jogi, who do not burn their dead bodies, but bury their corpses at Kolāgā, situated to the north-east of the town.

<sup>24</sup> The image had Lakṣmī and Sarasvatī on its right and left, but both were stolen a few years ago.

<sup>25</sup> Khanal (1973:59–61) published the Devanāgarī transcription of this inscription with a Nepali translation.

<sup>26</sup> For more on Newar pagoda-style temple architecture, see (Kölver 1996; Ronald 1979 and Wiesner 1978).

<sup>27</sup> Bhalchandra Deo (1968–69:38) attributed this structure to the late seventeenth and the early eighteenth century. Majupuria (1980–81) discusses the erotic depictions.

<sup>28</sup> For the low castes in Lalitpur see Gellner (1995:264–97).

<sup>29</sup> In Sankhu, the Duim caste was considered to dwell outside the town gate (*dhvākām pine*), but nowadays there are no such barriers. Only four Newar castes: the Nāy, the Jogi, the Doṃ and the Dyolā are still considered to be impure or unclean, and the so-called high-caste Newar do not accept drinking water from them (see Chapter 7).

<sup>30</sup> It is believed that they used to blow human bones to drive away ghosts and spirits (*bhut pret*) from the town. They have abandoned this task a long time ago.

<sup>31</sup> Surendraman Shrestha (1998) has presented the ritual and religious significance of the house in Newar society.

<sup>32</sup> They are *āju* and *ajimā* – god Bhairav and a mother goddess (Shrestha 1998:7).

## Chapter Six

<sup>1</sup> This number also includes those who are living temporarily outside the town for job, study or business reasons. Only those who have stopped coming to Sankhu even during major festivals are excluded from my survey. My definition of who is an inhabitant of Sankhu, in other words, is a ritual rather than a demographic one.

<sup>2</sup> The Nepali speaking community in Nepal is known by the name 'Parvate', which means the people from Hills or Mountains. They are also called 'Khasa.' Their language is also known by the same names, which later began to be called Gorkhālī rather than Nepali.

<sup>3</sup> The Tāmāngs are one of the various nationalities in Nepal. They are widely spread along the rim of the Kathmandu Valley and other hilly regions of Nepal and beyond. For more on the Tāmāngs see Tamang (1995).

<sup>4</sup> Founders of this party are former Panchayat leaders, so it is also known as Pancha's party.

<sup>5</sup> In 1991, for the first general election, forty-eight parties registered at the Election Commission. However, only six of them emerged as national parties securing more than three percent of the total votes cast in the election. During the second general election held in 1994, the number of parties dropped to less than thirty. Some parties like the Communist Party of Nepal (*Masāl*) and Nepali Communist League did not register at the Election Commission but they had their independent candidates participate in the elections.

<sup>6</sup> This author was involved in the survey by Sjoerd Zanen in 1978 (Zanen 1986:125).

<sup>7</sup> In 1981 the national population of aged 0–4 were 2,314,505 while in 1991 it became 2,707,352. It was an increase of 16.97 per cent (392,847). See HMG CBS (1991:4) and (1995:42).

<sup>8</sup> The 1981 census has 5,225,868 while in the 1991 census it increased to 6,922,546. See HMG CBS (1991:4–5) and (1995:42).

<sup>9</sup> According to *Population Census of Nepal 1991*, the average household size of Nepal is 5.6 (1995:1).

<sup>10</sup> The result was based on a sample survey conducted of 119 houses in Sankhu. See also HMG MHP (1969:61).

<sup>11</sup> According to traditional method of land measurement a *ropanī* of land is divided into sixteen *ānā*, while an *ānā* is divided into four *paisā* and a *paisā* is divided into four *dām*. A *ropanī* is a unit of land comprising an area of 5,476 square feet or 0.05 hectare. Depending upon the area and soil each ropanī of land grows four to seven *murī* of paddy in the Valley. *Murī* is a volumetric unit equivalent to 48.77 kg of paddy: one *murī* consists of 20 *pāthī*. A *pāthī* is a volumetric unit equivalent to 2.43 kg of paddy. A *pāthī* is divided into eight *mānā* and a *mānā* into eight *muṭhī* in the traditional method of measurement.

<sup>12</sup> A rupee is equivalent to .06 dollar.

<sup>13</sup> The government supplies the cheap rice; this rice is received as part of food aid by donor countries.

<sup>14</sup> Rankin (1999) analyses a local cultural economy of the Newar merchant community of Sankhu.

<sup>15</sup> See HMG CBS (1995:236–311), (1993:163–324) and (1995:26–40).

<sup>16</sup> For a discussion on the CBS data on mother tongues see Shrestha (1999b:2).

## Chapter Seven

<sup>1</sup> This data is for a single Kau family, because another family is excluded from this survey, as the family did not want to be surveyed. This family had five members in 1997.

<sup>2</sup> See Owens (1989:78–9). Allen argues hierarchy and complementarity both are existed in Newar eating arrangement (1993:11–8).

<sup>3</sup> Among the Nau, cutting of toenails or ritual purification is carried out by their own caste.

<sup>4</sup> See Zanen (1986:147). Rankin (1999) also presents this model for castes in Sankhu.

<sup>5</sup> Toffin (1995:186–208) presents a detailed view on Rājopādhyāy priests of the entire valley.

<sup>6</sup> Gellner (1995) presents in depth discussion on Vajrācārya and Śākya in Nepal. See also Rosser (1966), Greenwold (1978:483–504) and Locke (1980:9–65).

<sup>7</sup> In 1997, at the time of my research those five *thakālis* were Kul Ratna, Gharananda, Munindravajra, Purna Harshamanda and Kriyananda Vajrācārya respectively.

<sup>8</sup> Lienhard (1996:241–256) presents etymological details for Śākya. For more on the Śākya see Greenwold (1978:483–504); Locke (1980) and Gellner (1989:1–20).

<sup>9</sup> From personal communication in 1992. See Appendix of this Chapter for the nicknames used by the Śreṣṭha in Sankhu.

<sup>10</sup> Vajrācārya & Malla (1985:119, 164 and folio 63a)

<sup>11</sup> See Rosser (1966:101). Owens's Figure IIA also presents different category of Śreṣṭha. See Owens (1989:84).

<sup>12</sup> See Quigley (1994:80–108 and 1996:69–84). See also Webster (1993:406–424).

<sup>13</sup> Elsewhere in the Kathmandu Valley, generally Malla caste is considered to be *syasyaḥ*. They are also considered to be direct descendants of former Malla or Thakuri kings of the Valley.

<sup>14</sup> For more on Jyāpu caste in Kathmandu see Toffin (1994:433–59), Gellner & Pradhan (1995:158–85).

<sup>15</sup> See Toffin (1995a) for more details on Citrakārs of the Kathmandu Valley.

<sup>16</sup> Parry provides an interesting account of Mahābrāhmaṇa in Banaras. In Banaras, they are considered highly impure, inauspicious as Brahmin because they accept gifts in the name of malign ghosts. See Parry (1994:76–90).

<sup>17</sup> The 1997 survey provides data for only one family whose number were eleven. Since another Kau family, which refused to provide their date to surveyors has five members the total number of Kau in Sankhu is given here as sixteen.

<sup>18</sup> Such as during the festival of Vajrayoginī (April), cow feeding (August), the Vasundharā procession (Aug./Sept.), Kumārī feeding (Sept./Oct.) and at the time of offering food for the ghosts (April and Sept./Oct.).

<sup>19</sup> Boullier (1993) has discussed in detail on the Jogi caste.



<sup>20</sup> See Pradhan (1996:159–194 and 1986:180–234) for more on worship of the deceased ancestors among the Newars.

<sup>21</sup> Manandhar mentioned them as a sub-caste of the Jogī (1986:115).

<sup>22</sup> Gellner (1995:283) was told that there are five to six households of Dom in Patan.

<sup>23</sup> Dyolā in Panauti were also found collecting dead cows from the streets. See Toffin et.al. (1991:117).

<sup>24</sup> Toffin et al. (1991) provide a detailed account of Dyolā houses in Panauti. In Sankhu most Dyolā houses are single storeyed houses while in Panauti they are multi storeyed.

<sup>25</sup> See Gellner (1995:166).

<sup>26</sup> Gellner discussed this phenomenon in his article (1999:139–46).

## Chapter Eight

<sup>1</sup> Many scholars have discussed Newar *sī guthi* and *sanā guthi* elaborately. Among them Ishii (1996:39–55), who presents a detailed view of *sanā guthi* in a Newar village Satepa. Quigley (1985:30–49) presents an interesting report of *sī guthi* of Śreṣṭha in Dhulikhel. The story of his attempt to be admitted as a member in one of the *sī guthi* is dramatic. For more on *sī guthi*, see Rosser (1966:96–98), Toffin (1984:209–13), (1975) and (1977:43–5).

<sup>2</sup> A horoscope, made some time after the birth of a child, is considered to be essential and very important in a person's life in Newar society.

<sup>3</sup> In 2000, when this researcher's mother passed away, his four brothers carried the bier containing her body to the cremation ground and cremated it without allowing other *guthi* members to touch the body including the task of *mvagekegu*. It is customary not to let other *guthi* members touch the dead body when family members take the responsibility of cremation. However, *guthi* members are obliged to accompany them until the cremation is completed.

<sup>4</sup> The Newars worship Bhimsen as the god of trade, he is a character of the epic Mahābhārata, the second eldest of the five Pāṇḍava brothers.

<sup>5</sup> Offering of a small portion of food to gods before eating any meal is one of the essential Newar ritual traditions. The food portions offered to gods are later thrown away with leftovers.

<sup>6</sup> The distribution of *sī* may vary from one place to another. Toffin noted a different case in Pyangaon (1976:330 and 1984:104–5). See also Gellner (1992:232 and note 1).

## Chapter Nine

<sup>1</sup> See Rankin (1999: Appendix B) for *guthi* records related to Vajrayoginī and other *guthi* of Sankhu collected at the Regmi Research Collection, Nepal National Archives and the Guthi Corporation. Sharma (1994:33–51) presents records of some of the *guthi* related to Vajrayoginī.

<sup>2</sup> In chronicles related to Vajrayoginī the word Besata is mentioned as the guards of ornaments belonging to the goddess Vajrayoginī.

<sup>3</sup> A *pathī* is a volumetric unit equivalent to 2.43 kg of paddy.

<sup>4</sup> In 1997, at the time of my research those five thakālis were Kul Ratna, Gharananda, Munindravajra, Purna Harshamanda and Kriyananda Vajrācārya respectively.

<sup>5</sup> See Chapter 14 for details on the fire sacrifices.

<sup>6</sup> See Chapter 14 for *bhog chāyegu* ritual.

<sup>7</sup> Record # DI 478, registered (*lagat*) date 1941 (1998 VS), the Guthi Corporation.

<sup>8</sup> This statue of Vasundharā is carried out on *mū jātrā*, the main procession of Vajrayoginī in the town and remains with other processional statues during the remaining days of the festival.

<sup>9</sup> A *ropanī* is a unit of land comprising an area of 5,476 square feet or 0.05 hectre.

<sup>10</sup> See Chapter 14 for the details on Lasakusa, the ceremonial welcome of the deities by this *guthi*.

<sup>11</sup> Nepalese people consume boiled rice twice a day. Among the Newars, as well as among the Parvate communities, eating boiled rice makes them ritually unclean until they rinse their mouth and wash their hands after the meals. It also makes their kitchen-space unclean until it is being smeared with cow dung mixed with red clay and water. Before cooking any festive food it is essential to smear the kitchen with cow dung, red clay and water.

<sup>12</sup> It is common among the Newars to eat *choyalā bhu* on the eve of any major feast or festival to keep themselves ritually pure for the following day.

<sup>13</sup> Record # DI 474, registered (*lagat*) nd, the Guthi Corporation

<sup>14</sup> In Sankhu a common saying goes “*Gubhādyoyā tisā gubhājutay nasā*”, which means the ornaments belonging to Vajrayoginī are food for the Vajrācārya priests.

<sup>15</sup> In 1936 AD it is recorded that this Tisābicāh *guthi* had one *ropanī* six *ānā* and three *paisā* land as its source of income. See the Guthi Corporation Record # DI 214, registered 1936 (1993 VS).

<sup>16</sup> Mahām is the Newar term for an army or soldier.

<sup>17</sup> Thekedār, Sundar Shrestha, whom I interviewed, passed away in 1997. Hanumandas and Singha Kumāi Shrestha of Sankhu have taken over his duties, but local VDC leaders obtain the necessary sums from the Guthi Corporation to pay them. These two gentlemen receive an extra two thousands rupees each as remuneration.

<sup>18</sup> Record # DI 162, registered 1937 (1994 VS).

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 14 for more on VDCs’ role during the Festival of Vajrayoginī.

<sup>20</sup> In Kathmandu, Thā pūjā is performed at the temple of the mother goddess Hāriti Ajimā (Manandhar 1986:101).

<sup>21</sup> See Record # DI 140.

<sup>22</sup> See Record # DI 244 1918 (1975 VS).

<sup>23</sup> See Record # DI 459 1932 (1989VS). Sharma (1994:36–40) presents another document related to this *guthi* dated 1940 (1997 VS) from the Guthi Corporation.

<sup>24</sup> See vol. 14, reel 2422, pp 1152–74.

<sup>25</sup> See Record # DI 247.

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- <sup>26</sup> See the Guthi Corporation Record # 247. See also Regmi Research Collection Vol. 14, reel 2422, pp 651–3.
- <sup>27</sup> See the Guthi Corporation Record # DI 143.
- <sup>28</sup> The Guthi Corporation Record # DI 239 registered in 1938 AD (1993 VS) and # DI 259 registered in 1939 AD (1994 VS). See also Regmi Research Collection Vol. 14 reel 2422 page 672–4.
- <sup>29</sup> This is my own estimation based on interviews with various people in Sankhu.
- <sup>30</sup> She was a Brahmin widow who was married to king Ranabahadur (Wright 1972:262).
- <sup>31</sup> See Regmi Research Collection Vol. 3, reel 2390, pp 437.
- <sup>32</sup> During the Rana time this office used to look after the state owned *guthi* in Nepal, which later replaced by the Guthi Corporation.
- <sup>33</sup> See the Guthi Corporation Record # DI 237 dated 1937 (1994 VS). See also Record #DI 243 dated 1936 (1993 VS).
- <sup>34</sup> See the Guthi Corporation record # DI 16. See also Regmi Research Collection Vol. 4, reel 2391, pp 732 and Vol. 14 reel 2422, pp 180–201.
- <sup>35</sup> See Regmi Research Collection Vol. 14 reel 2422, pp 679–85. See also the Guthi Corporation Record # DI 47.
- <sup>36</sup> See the Guthi Corporation Record # DI 138.
- <sup>37</sup> See Regmi Research Collection Vol. 4 reel 2391, pp 864.
- <sup>38</sup> See Regmi Research Collection Vol. 14 reel 2422, pp 646–8.
- <sup>39</sup> See the Guthi Corporation Record # DI 803.
- <sup>40</sup> Yomari is a special kind of rice cake made to celebrate the festival of Yomaripunhi (see Chapter 10 for more on Yomaripunhi festival).
- <sup>41</sup> Record # 2, 1938 AD.
- <sup>42</sup> Sacrifices of serpents are carried out in other places too. See Van den Hoek & Shrestha (1992a) and Nijland, Shrestha & Van den Hoek (1997).
- <sup>43</sup> See also the Guthi Corporation Record # DI 89.
- <sup>44</sup> See Regmi Research Collection Vol. 14, reel 2422 pp 651–3.
- <sup>45</sup> Mañicūḍa pond is a pilgrimage site located at the top of Mañicūḍa Mountain. Both Hindu and Buddhists visit this place on different occasions.
- <sup>46</sup> Hāthudyo is a compound word derived from *hāva+thvaṃ+dyo*, which means spouting+beer+god in Newar language. Spouting beer from the mouth of a wooden Bhairav is common during the Yaṃlā festival.
- <sup>47</sup> Record # DI 920
- <sup>48</sup> See also Yaṃlā Festival in Chapter 10.
- <sup>49</sup> Navadurgā is one of the most famous dances of the Valley. Every year, the dance begins on the tenth day of the Dasain festival and ends with the burning of the masks on the day of Bhalabhala Aṣṭamī (June). The main temple of Navadurgā is in Bhaktapur. From the moment of their appearance they begin to perform their dances in Bhaktapur town and visit many small towns, villages and settlements around Bhaktapur to perform their dances. Sankhu is one of them. See Gutschow & Basukala (1987) see also Levy (1992).
- <sup>50</sup> *Busādhana* or *bosādhana* is a word derived from a Sanskrit word anniversary, *varṣa-vandhana*. See Malla (2000:338).

<sup>51</sup> See the Guthi Corporation record # 172.

<sup>52</sup> See Regmi Research Collection Vol. 14, reel 2422 pp 633–5.

## Chapter Ten

<sup>1</sup> For more on Nepalese festivals see Nepali (1965:343–413), Anderson (1971), Calise (1982), Gellner (1992:213–220), Vajrācārya, P. (1979), Vajrācārya, A. (1988), Toffin (1984:501–54), Lewis (1984:337–441), and Pradhan (1986:286–416) Shrestha (2001).

<sup>2</sup> See Sharma (1997:153–4) and see Gopālarājvamsāvalī folio 21, 23, 29, 56, 61 and 63 (Vajrācārya & Malla eds. 1985).

<sup>3</sup> Many inscriptions from the Licchavī period (4th to 9th century) provide ample examples of the tradition of religious festivals in Nepal (Vajrācārya 1999:82–87).

<sup>4</sup> Pundit Ashakaji (Ganeshraj) Vajrācārya copied and translated this book into the Newar language from the original text. The translator states that Pandit Kanthānānda Brāhmaṇa originally compiled this book in Sanskrit. For more on Svanti festival see (Anderson 1977:164–174; Levy 1992:411–417 and Vajrācārya 1988).

<sup>5</sup> The then Chairman of Pukhulāchi VDC, Mankaji Manandhar told me that he tried to revive the tradition by supplying wages to the Jogi for their duties but failed.

<sup>6</sup> On the political map of Nepal Sankhu nowadays lies in Kathmandu district while Cāṃgunarāyaṇa lies in Bhaktapur district.

<sup>7</sup> Naghabhani (Rajbhandari) (2000:139–152) denies the credibility of the former story and asserts the latter one behind the tradition of Bālācarhe.

<sup>8</sup> It is a Newar town situated outside the Kathmandu Valley to the East.

<sup>9</sup> For more on the Navadurgā see (Gutschow & Basukala 1987; Levy 1987 and Korvald 1994:405–415).

<sup>10</sup> For Kathmandu Gathu Dances see Van den Hoek (1994:373–404).

<sup>11</sup> See Toffin (1992:74–92) has elaborately discussed on Indra pole erected in Hanumāṇdhokā royal palace. During Pāhāṃcarhe and Indrāyaṇī festivals too such poles are to be found erected in Kathmandu (Van den Hoek & Shrestha 1992a:67).

<sup>12</sup> Suvarṇa Kumār, a form of Lord Viṣṇu is considered to be a pure unmarried male.

<sup>13</sup> I counted twenty-one Gathāṃmugaḥ effigies in Sankhu.

<sup>14</sup> There used to be eight ponds in Sankhu, four of ponds have been filled with earth in the recent past, while four still exist. During the Gathāṃmugaḥ festival only two ponds are considered holy for taking a bath. Two ponds where *bijāha* plants used to grow have disappeared, otherwise to make the effigies of a bhudyo people used to get *bijāha* plants from these ponds.

<sup>15</sup> See Chapter 9 for more about Guṃlā Bajam *guthi* in Sankhu. Lewis (1993 7–52) presents exclusively on Kathmandu Guṃlā.

<sup>16</sup> For more about Bhaktapur Sāyāḥ see Levy (1992:442–52).

<sup>17</sup> *Siṃgavira pyākhām*, *Sattalasīṅga pyākhām*, *Byādhā pyākhām*, *Duṃgā pyākhām*, *Nāyā pyākhām*, *Lākhe pyākhām* are among them.

<sup>18</sup> For a description of *Pañjārām Guthi* see Chapter 9.

<sup>19</sup> The word ‘Endayāta’ as a name for this festival is already found in the fourteen-century Nepalese chronicles, *Gopālarājavamśāvalī*, considered being the eldest chronicle of Nepal (Vajrācārya & Malla 1985: folio 29).

<sup>20</sup> See Shrestha & Juju (1988:64). I found most people in Kathmandu calling him either Indradyo or Indrānidyo but not “Yaṃmādyah”.

<sup>21</sup> Sakya (1994:16) mentions them as Yaṃmahādyo.

<sup>22</sup> For more details on Kumārī see Allen (1987). Naghabhani (Rājbandarī) (1988/9:1–12) examines historiography of the tradition of Kumārī worship in Nepal.

<sup>23</sup> See Pradhan (1986:268–315) for its celebration in Kathmandu, for Bhaktapur see Levy (1992:523–63), see also Nepali (1965:404–11). Bennett (1983:136–41 & 261–72) treats the celebration among the Brahmin and Kṣetris in Narikot while Pfaff-Czarnecka (1996) provides her observations from Belkot.

<sup>24</sup> The fruit can be different in each family. My observation is based on my own family worship and interviews with several other families.

<sup>25</sup> See Chapter 9 for more on *Taleju Guthi*.

<sup>26</sup> See Ishii (1993) for a comparison of annual festivals celebrated among Parvate Hindus, Newars and Maithili, the three major ethnic groups of Nepal.

<sup>27</sup> Pradhan (1986:237–8).

<sup>28</sup> This is author’s free translation from Sharma. See Sharma (1997:147–8).

## Chapter Eleven

<sup>1</sup> Lewis (1984:395–403) called it a six-day festival but he has recorded only five days of activities. See Toffin (1984:538–42) for his interpretation of this festival from Panauti. See Nepali (1965:381–83) for his observation of Mha pūjā and a comparison of Newar Kijā pūjā with the Parvates’ Bhāitika. More on the Parvates’ Bhāitika see Bennett (1983:246–252). See the table presented by Ishii (1993:74–77) for a comparison of celebrating this festival between the Mithila, the Parvate Hindus and the Newars.

<sup>2</sup> *Janaipurnimā* is celebrated on the full-moon day of the Guṃlā month in August. On this day, the Brahmins change their sacred threads (*janai*) and distribute threads to general people.

<sup>3</sup> A. Sharma deals with the general worship of Lakṣmī (1987:11). Naghabhani critically examines critically the tradition of worshipping Lakṣmī in Nepal, but he does not provide clear references to his sources (1991:48–71).

<sup>4</sup> According to the famous Nepalese traditional painter Premman Citrakar she is Suvarṇa Lakṣmī. See also Naghabhani (1991:65).

<sup>5</sup> See Slusser (1982:389), also Vajrācārya & Malla (1985:236). See also Pradhan (1979:1–6) and Pradhan (1998:29).

<sup>6</sup> However, dates of the Vikram era started being carved on coins only since 1911 AD. See Pradhan (1998:30).

<sup>7</sup> In 1928 AD, for the first time Dharmaditya Dharmacarya (Jagatman Vaidya) proposed in his magazine *Buddhadharma va Nepāl bhāṣā* to celebrate the New Year's day of Nepal Samvat as a national event. See Nepāl Bhāṣā Mamkāḥ Khalah (NMK) (1993:65).

<sup>8</sup> According to "Sthirobhava-Vakya" these household items represent deities. See Slusser (1998:421).

<sup>9</sup> In Newar households, worshipping of Gaṇeśa is essential before the beginning of any ritual activity.

<sup>10</sup> For his interpretations of *kheluitā* see Gvamga (1999:1–5).

<sup>11</sup> Shrestha & Juju (1985:1–9) argues that many Tāntrik deities that are worshipped today were once human beings. See Shrestha & Juju (1985:60–68) for their views on Svanti.

<sup>12</sup> Many also consider them only the messengers of Yama and Śiva (Yamadut and Śivadut). In his study, Nepali (1987:383) found that elder brothers were regarded as Yamrāj and younger one as Citragupta among the Newars, but I did not encounter with any such interpretations.

<sup>13</sup> This position may vary from one family to another, and does not seem to be meaningful.

<sup>14</sup> During the period of each two *nakṣatra* or 'Lunar Mansion' one 'Paṃncaka' is counted. *Nakṣatra* are constellations of fixed stars. They are twenty-seven in numbers but some also consider them as twenty-eight.

<sup>15</sup> These two festivals are celebrated according to the solar-based Vikram calendar.

## Chapter Twelve

<sup>1</sup> An inscription dated 1789 (NS 909) attached to the front wall of the rest house (Dhalampū) tells that it was reconstructed as the old rest place was in a dilapidated condition. This rest place is situated on the bank of Śālinadī and male participants of the fast spend nights in this rest house during the festival month.

<sup>2</sup> Surendra Rājopādhyāy, the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa priest in Sankhu, allowed me to photocopy two different versions of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Pratisthā Pūjā (MPP I and II). Both are handwritten texts, the first one being written in Pracalita Nepal script and second one in Devanāgarī script. The first one does not say when it was copied or written but in an additional page a separate note mentioning some items needed for a ritual is dated N S 1040 NS (AD 1920). It states that two brothers, Padmeśānanda and Jotiśānanda Rājopādhyāy, share its ownership. The second text of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Pratisthā Pūjā (MPP II) is written fully in Devanāgarī. As it states (page 117) Samkarjvalananda Rājopādhyāy of Lalitpur Patko Mahāpāl copied it from the first one (MMP-I) on Monday 6 Cīlāgā 1075 NS (AD 1955).

<sup>3</sup> During my interview, one of the members of the Bhaktapur Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Vrata Committee, Mr. Jaganath Lachigochem, showed me a document containing a list of organisers of the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Vrata in Bhaktapur from 1771 to 1794

(891 to 914 NS). However, he did not know what happened after the year 1794. Some of the devotees in Bhaktapur have now initiated this *Vrata* again, but it is difficult to connect the present initiative with the past one. An inscription at the banks of the Hanumante River tells that the present initiative was taken by a group of devotees donating money for a trust in 1986. This trust is now active in running the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *Vrata* in Bhaktapur.

<sup>4</sup> This information I gathered from personal communication with the Rājopādhyāy priests, Surendra of Sankhu, Bhishmajvalananda of Kathmandu, Sumanraj of Pharping and Parasara of Bhaktapur. They told me that, for the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa fast, they use a ritual text called “Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *Vrata* Paddhati” or ‘the rules of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa fast’, which is entirely different from the Svasthānī *vrata* ritual.

<sup>5</sup> See (folio 6a), Svasthānī *Vrata* Kathā (SV) dated 723 NS, National Archives (Reel no. 34 A 344/5)

<sup>6</sup> See SV (folio 8a–9a).

<sup>7</sup> See the National Archives (Reel no. 8–D 13/42).

<sup>8</sup> See (Anderson 1977:225–29; Prakashman 1998 and Shrestha 1995b). Lynn Bennett provides an overview of the Svasthānī story and *vrata* ritual as the Parvate women perform it. However, her report of the *vrata* performed at Śālinadī is incomplete and inaccurate (1983:272–306).

<sup>9</sup> Both Syārbā and Giri have the same roles during the Devī Dances in Sankhu (See Chapter 15).

<sup>10</sup> For more on the Mādhav Nārāyaṇa *guthi*, see Chapter 9.

<sup>11</sup> Iltis (1985:674) states that the *sābā* musicians stay in homes in Sankhu, but this is not the case.

<sup>12</sup> In Bhaktapur all the women appeared to spend their nights in a rest house on the bank of river Hanumante for the whole month of the fast.

<sup>13</sup> I noted twenty-six items, and among them fourteen used Vikram Saṃvat and twelve used Nepal Saṃvat. Most of them used the Newar language and Devanāgarī scripts, while a few used Nepal scripts. A few of them also used the Parvate language.

<sup>14</sup> In the past, the Jogi musicians used to play their music at the time of performing the *dhalaṃdanegu* ritual in the Śālinadī every day. This tradition has also been stopped.

<sup>15</sup> See Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Pratisthā Pūjā (MPP-I) and Mādhav Nārāyaṇa Pratisthā Pūjā (MPP II).

<sup>16</sup> Names recited were Hastidanta Mr̥ttikā, Pārovān Mr̥ttikā, Vālmikī Mr̥ttikā, Pivacoyā Mr̥ttikā, Rājdīvāra Mr̥ttikā, Śamidhemūla Mr̥ttikā, Gośṛṅga Mr̥ttikā, Viṣṇudvāra Mr̥ttikā, Padmamūla Mr̥ttikā, Varāhanathvayā Mr̥ttikā, Śivadvāra Mr̥ttikā and Pivodokaya Mr̥ttikā. See MPP I (page 55–57) and MPP II (page 57–60).

<sup>17</sup> Among different Newar castes Bārḥātayegu is an essential ritual performed after Ihi and before marriage for girls. See Allen (1982:192–5) for more on the Bārḥātayegu ceremony among the Newars.

<sup>18</sup> Daśakarma kriyā is an important ‘rite of passage’ performed in Newar society for human beings as well.

<sup>19</sup> See Chapter 4 for a myth related to Sādhukolām.

<sup>20</sup> See Iltis (1985:910–11). She may have adopted this idea from Mary Anderson (1988: 226–28).

## Chapter Thirteen

<sup>1</sup> Personal communication from Mr. Sukrasagar Shrestha, a prominent Nepalese archaeologist.

<sup>2</sup> Regmi lists him as Mānadeva III, who ruled for 31 years, not later than AD 768 or 200 AE (Aṃśuvarman era), see (Regmi 1965:86).

<sup>3</sup> Vajrayoginī is considered to be identical in appearance to the Śākta goddess Chinamastā. She is generally represented as accompanied by two *yoginīs*, one on either side of her (Bhattacharyya 1992:241). Yoginī denotes female Tantric aspirants, a class of goddesses and different aspects of the Female Principle residing within the human body. The earlier *yoginīs* were women of flesh and blood, priestesses supposed to be possessed by the goddess. See English (2002) for an extensive discussion on the cult of Vajrayoginī in India.

<sup>4</sup> See the SSS, folio 50a and 50b.

<sup>5</sup> The inscription is not clear, however, with respect to which roof he replaced with brass.

<sup>6</sup> See in D. Regmi (1966 as numbers 53, 137 and 147, pages 91–5, 286 and 304–5).

<sup>7</sup> Rajvamsi presents as inscription numbers 28, 58, 73, 125, 240, 266, 314 and 322 (1963:13, 27, 33–34, 54, 92, 101, 118 and 121).

<sup>8</sup> Regmi also recorded these two inscriptions in his volume (1966:286 and 304–5).

<sup>9</sup> Regmi also includes this inscription (1966:91–95).

<sup>10</sup> This inscription is about 30 centimetres long and its breadth is about twenty centimetres. It was brought out from the Temple and the priest whose turn it was in the temple, gave me a chance to take a picture in December 1997.

<sup>11</sup> It is written in a colophon I recently obtained from a Vajrācārya priest of Sankhu. Another scribe notes the same incident as 1914 (1034).

<sup>12</sup> I suppose it is made of either wood or clay. The Vajrācārya priests as well the painters (Citrakār), who are the only ones to have access to the statue, are not willing to disclose the material because of their religious secrecy (*dikṣā*).

<sup>13</sup> There is no eternal fire inside the Paśupati temple complex itself. One Agnimaṭha we found about four hundred metres south of the Paśupati temple complex is comparable to Patan Agnimaṭha. It appeared from our investigation that this Agnimaṭha was a nineteenth century invention. The Guthi Corporation has employed a Parvate Brahmin to look after it. The Brahmin *yajaman* did not know whether it had any link with the eternal fire at Vajrayoginī.

<sup>14</sup> P. Sharma (1970:3) identified it as the Buddha and dated it earlier than the eleventh century, while Locke (1988/9) attributed it to the fifth century AD.



<sup>15</sup> She is also worshipped as the earth mother. Besides these statues of Vasundharā there are two more statues of Vasundharā; one of them is in the pagoda temple where the fixed statue of Vajrayoginī is kept, and one in the Vajrācāryas' "secret god house" (*āgamcheṃ*) in town, which is brought out in the middle of the Vajrayoginī festival.

<sup>16</sup> See S. Manandhar (1998) for more on Newar ornaments.

<sup>17</sup> According to the MM she holds a blue lotus.

<sup>18</sup> Although the story about the visit of an eighth century Śaṅkarācārya in Nepal is commonly known, there is no evidence to show that it is true. Locke thinks that the story of Śaṅkarācārya may well have arisen from the coming of a much later Śaṅkarācārya, who is known from a single inscription dated 1142 (NS 262), but this inscription gives no evidence of violent encounters with Buddhists (Locke 1985:481–2).

<sup>19</sup> According to Gautam, Vajrācārya Gaṇṭhakuṭa or Gaṇṭhakuṭī style is Śikhara style (G. Vajrācārya 1967:378–79 and 1966:33). For more on Gaṇṭhakuṭa, see (Slusser 1982:164 and Sharma 1996:279). See also Khatry (1989:60–7) for more on the Śikhara style temples of Nepal.

<sup>20</sup> Gyanendra Joshi, an architect of Bhaktapur who also did the drawing of the temple presented here, made the measurement.

<sup>21</sup> *Rupinī* is a *dākinī* and a minor Mahāyāna goddess attending on Buddhakapāla (Liebert 1976:243). *Dākinī* is also considered to be one of the attendants of Chinnamastā, standing on her left and drinking blood that is flowing from the severed throat of Chinnamasta. The conception of Chinnamastā recalls that of the Buddhist Vajrayoginī (Bhattacharyya 1992:353).

<sup>22</sup> There are five branches (*kavaḥ*) of Vajrācārya in Sankhu, each of which gets eight days in turn to guard in the temple. In each branch there are several sub-branches, because of the divisions among their descendants.

<sup>23</sup> Comparing Vajrayoginī with other *yoginīs*, Locke (1985:467–8) confirms that she is not a *yoginī* at all. For more on her iconography, see (Sharma, P.R. 1970:3 n 1).

<sup>24</sup> It is notable that the goddess Vajrayoginī in Pharping, a Newar town situated south of Kathmandu, is iconographically fitting to her name because she holds a thunderbolt (*vajra*) in her right hand and a bowl (*pātra*) in her right hand. Its processional statue is kept at the same temple in a separate room. Interestingly enough, the fixed statue is red-faced and the processional statue is yellow-faced, as is the case in Sankhu. As the Vajrācārya priest on duty told me, the red-faced goddess is made of earth, while the processional statue is made of bronze. Once a year on the day of Pañjārām in August her procession goes around the town of Pharping. The priest told me that traditionally the repainting of the red-faced one is carried out once every twelve years, but due to a lack of financial means no repainting has been carried out since 1987.

<sup>25</sup> It is not clear from his statement from which Purāṇa he has quotes (see Sayami (1980:41; Liebert 1976:354 and Monier Williams 1979:858).

<sup>26</sup> *Tārā* is the common name given to a large number of goddesses such as Jāṅguli, Paṇṣābarī, Māhācinatārā, Ekajaṭā and others (Bhattacharyya 1992:240–1).

<sup>27</sup> The author did not mention the year of his visit, but we can assume his visit was before 1924, because his book was first published in 1924. See (1924:76); see also the 1993 edition of Delhi: Asian Education Centre.

<sup>28</sup> Chinnamastā's appearance, however, is entirely different from the goddess Vajrayoginī of Sankhu. According to Bhattacharyya (1992:241 and 353) "Chinnamastā holding her head in her left hand and drinking the blood flowing from her severed throat with her dreadful tongue. Her hair is dishevelled. She holds a skull-vessel in the left hand and a knife in the right."

<sup>29</sup> A personal communication from the archaeologist Sukrasagar Shrestha.

<sup>30</sup> The rare picture of the Nemuni is included as a "Standing Buddha" in Bangdel (1989:147).

<sup>31</sup> See Pruscha (1975:154). See also Zanen (1986:128).

<sup>32</sup> It is written in old Newar script and in mixed Newar and Sanskrit languages.

<sup>33</sup> *Kalaḥ* is a basket made either of reed or of metal such as brass, copper or silver. A *kalaḥ pūjā* is a basket with materials for worship such as: red and yellow powder, raw rice, popped rice, flowers, incense, wicks soaked in oil, garlands of thread (*jajamkā*), sweet breads, fruits, fried egg (only in this case, otherwise uncooked egg), and *samaybaji* and liquor.

<sup>34</sup> I am grateful to Ambikā, Sapana and Dipesh Shrestha who did this survey for me.

<sup>35</sup> *Jvalānhāykaṃ* is a kind of mirror used for religious rites; it can be made of brass, copper, bronze or silver.

<sup>36</sup> A drum to which thongs with weights on the ends are attached (Manandhar 1986:107).

<sup>37</sup> Yaba Shrestha, who was able to see the observable parts of the ceremony, supplied me with notes.

<sup>38</sup> In 1998 Professor Mangalraj Joṣī did it. He inherited this duty from his father.

<sup>39</sup> *Japa* is taking within and muttering the syllables in terms of the identity of *guru*, *mantra* and *devatā*. Bhattacharyya (1992:430) quoted it from Puraścaryāṇava VI. P. 541.

<sup>40</sup> In 1998 they were Dharmaratna, Ananda, Babukrishna, Premratna and Sunil Sākya.

<sup>41</sup> One was Premman Citrakār, who is one of the famous Thankā painters of Nepal these days.

<sup>42</sup> See also his interview published in *Sandhyā Times*, Newar daily 4 July 1998 Vol 3 No. 243, page 3.

<sup>43</sup> Locke recorded similar rituals performed during the annual bathing ceremony of Macchendrañāth in Kathmandu (1908:209–17).

<sup>44</sup> See the SSS folio 24b. See also the MMC folio 29. The MMC also says that king Lakṣmīnaraśiṃha Malla Deva replaced the copper face with a gilded one during the renovation.

<sup>45</sup> See the 1997 report of the Sankhu Vajrayoginī Sudhār Samiti.

## Chapter Fourteen

<sup>1</sup> In Hindu belief Kaligata dates from the era of destruction, which began 3100 years before the birth of Christ. The Kaligata era can be formulated adding 3100 to Christian calendar.

<sup>2</sup> Pañyāju is one of the nicknames of a Shrestha family in Sankhu.

<sup>3</sup> The Śānti Svasti Saphū (abovementioned chronicle) reveals the fact that in the old days too this temple was known by the name Svayambhū, but now the name is most commonly used to denote another Buddhist site at Kathmandu.

<sup>4</sup> They were: Basudev Jośī, Ramesvar Jośī and Jagadisvar Jośī, Amrit Pukhusi, Haribol Shrestha and Naraman Nyāsi Shrestha in 1997. As a Vajrācārya priest said, they are the descendants of astrologers and noble men of Sankhu who played important roles in relation to the temple of Vajrayoginī and the festival.

<sup>5</sup> Traditionally making a round of the town with the butchers' music is the method of making any public announcement. For the detail on *the nāykhim bājā*, see Wegner 1988).

<sup>6</sup> He was first elected to this post in 1982 and later in 1987, each time for a five year term.

<sup>7</sup> In the Kathmandu Valley such fire sacrifices are very common. I have observed many fire sacrifices which consist of similar components, but were open.

<sup>8</sup> See Gellner (1996:150 and 1991:161–97). See also Vajrācārya (1994:5–28).

<sup>9</sup> Only a few priests are capable of understanding or explaining the meaning of such *ślokas*. Most Brahmin as well as Vajrācārya priests, whom we met during our research, were unable to provide any explanation for the *ślokas* they were reciting.

<sup>10</sup> I have witnessed Indrāyaṇī, Bhadrakālī, Kāmkeśvarī, and Maitidevī fire sacrifices in Kathmandu. These were performed in front of their respective temples, but they were evoked in a *kalaśa* at the same time.

<sup>11</sup> According to the priest they were Vedic formulas (*mantras*), but it was not clear to which Veda he referred.

<sup>12</sup> Locke (1980) gives a detailed view on the ritual bathing of Janabāhādyo, but the ritual bathing at Vajrayoginī is not comparable to Janabāhādyo because it is a brief and symbolic one.

<sup>13</sup> The *dāphā* music contains one pair of two-sided large drums (*khim*), a pair of cupped cymbals (*timchu*) and traditional devotional songs sung by a group of people.

<sup>14</sup> In the Valley, musical band is a part of procession of any deities. Exceptionally, during the Triśūl yātrā in Deopatan no music is played. Michaels (1987) discusses in detail on the Triśūl yātrā in Deopatan.

<sup>15</sup> There are several modes for playing the butcher's music, and *bārādāyegu* is one among them. See Wegner for *bārādāyegu* notations (1988:85).

<sup>16</sup> For more on the Guthi Corporation, see Regmi (1976:58–60).

<sup>17</sup> In the past both of these groups were in one *Svām guthi*, which split into two. As one informant told me, there used to be many *Svām guthis*, but gradually they have disappeared, and now only these two remain.

<sup>18</sup> Hemraj Sakya (1993) presents a list of these eighty-four ingredients, but the items may vary from one place to another.

<sup>19</sup> Chvāsah is a place at the crossroads where certain items are ritually discarded at the time of birth, death, and at the time of warding off spirits. See Manandhar (1986:71).

<sup>20</sup> In the Kathmandu Valley the Kānpaṭā yogīs perform *Cakra pūjā* during different *Yātrās* (Locke 1980:229–30, 441–42).

<sup>21</sup> See Prakashman (1997:3), but according to Briggs, Cakra pūjā has its own philosophy. His description, however, does not fit the Cakra pūjā in Sankhu (1989:173).

<sup>22</sup> Lasakusa, the ceremonial welcome, is a standard ritual performed at the gate of the bridegroom's home for a newly married couple before they step into the groom's home on the day of the marriage. Similar rituals are performed for the deities when they are returned to their god house from the procession (Manandhar 1986:224–5).

<sup>23</sup> See Locke (1985) for his interpretation of Karuṇāmaya worship in Kathmandu, Owens (1989) for Bumgadyo of Patan, and Gellner (1992) for Patan Kvabhal.

<sup>24</sup> This researcher found such families in Thosse, a small Newar village situated at a distance of about three hundred kilometers northeast of Kathmandu. Their great-grandfather moved from Sankhu to this place and settled permanently at the beginning of last century, but his descendants still celebrate the festival of Vajrayoginī as the most important one.

<sup>25</sup> Bledsoe (1998) discusses the relation between kings and the goddess Vajrayoginī during the Malla time.

## Chapter Fifteen

<sup>1</sup> Many scholars have discussed on the tradition of dance and drama during the Malla period (Malla 1982:66, 65–76; Vaidya & Kāṃsākār 1991:10, ix; Iltis 1990:146; Vajrācārya 1990:40–44).

<sup>2</sup> Many have paid their attention to this subject (i.e., Hopkins 1971:126; O'Flaherty 1975:238–69; Wilkins 1882:285–20).

<sup>3</sup> See Tuladhar (1979/80:47). She exclusively discusses on *gvay dām*.

<sup>4</sup> See Juju & Shrestha (1985:13). They have discussed importance of *samaybaji* in Newar rituals.

## Chapter Sixteen

<sup>1</sup> Shrestha & Juju (1988:3) maintain that Kathmandu was constructed in the shape of a sword. The sword is one of the weapons carried by the goddess Durgā, the slayer of the demon Maḥiṣāsura.

<sup>2</sup> Sakya (2000:337–8) noted a disbanding of caste-bound duties by the Kapālī (Jogī) and Kāranjit (Bhā) in southern Kathmandu from the early 1990s.

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<sup>3</sup> A Nepali book *Chāpāmā Dalit* (Discriminated Castes in Print Media), attempts to synthesise this phenomenon (Onta et al. 2001). It also presents a list of 176 organisations, which are active against caste discrimination in Nepal. The list includes sister organisations of political parties and non-governmental organisations.

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## GLOSSARY

*abal*: the first grade of land with the most fertile soil.

*abhay*: fearlessness

*abhyantar*: a secret

*abir*: red powder

*Ācāju* (*Ācāla*): a Newar Hindu priest

*adhikamāsa*: an extra month added to the lunar calendar

*āgaṃ*: secret house shrines

*āgaṃ dyo*: secret family deities

*agnisthāpanā*: the installation of fire

*ahiṃsā*: non-violence

*ākhāḥ chem*: the house of instruction

*ākhe*: husked rice used for ritual purposes

*akhaṇḍajyoti* (Skt.): ever-burning flame

*akṣatāmadhi*: steamed pastries made of wheat flour

*Akṣobhyatathāgata*: a Buddha

*āmāli*: a sour fruit (*spondias acuminata*)

*Amāntaka*: the month ending with the new moon

*aṃga*: a wall

*ānā*: a unit of land comprising an area of 342.25 square feet, sixteenth part of a *ropanī*

*annaprāśana* (Skt.): the ceremony of feeding with grains

*āraṇya*: the forest

*ārati*: an evening ritual

*ardharājya*: regional kingdom

*Asali Hindustān*: the true land of the Hindus

*āsana*: a seat

*aṣṭabhairava*: eight Bhairava

*aṣṭamangala*: eight auspicious signs

*aṣṭamātṛkā pīṭha*: a shrine of the eight mother goddesses

*Āśvina*: the sixth month of the Vikram calendar

*avadāna*: Buddhist stories

*āvāṇa* (Skt.): the invocation

*āypā*: tiles

*Ayodhyā*: a place of pilgrimage in northern India, supposed to be the kingdom of the epic hero Rāma

*babhū*: a kind of cymbal

*bāhāḥ* (*bāhā*): a Buddhist monastery (Skt. *vihāra*)

*bāhām*: a sacrificial animal

*bahi*: a smaller Buddhist monastery

*bahujāti*: multi-ethnic

*baiga*: the top floor

*baji*: flattened or beaten rice, daytime food

*bākhām lhāyegu*: story telling

*balcā*: a temporary hut.

*balimpiyegu*: to ward off evil spirits

*bali pūjā*: the ritual offerings made to ward off evil spirits

*baṃjā*: businessmen

*baṃmanu*: bushman

*baṃ*: a fine

*baṃ puikegu*: to penalise

*bara*: blessings

*Bare*: a man of the Śākya caste

*bārhatayegu*: a pre-puberty ritual ceremony conducted for Newar girls

*batukarṇa*: the ritual performed for a male child

- bau*: food offered to deceased ancestors, spirits and ghosts  
*Bauyā khvāḥ svayegu*: the honouring of one's father  
*benām*: nickname  
*Betā* (Betāl): a gentle kind of demon  
*Bhā* (Kāranjit): a funeral priest in Newar society  
*Bhairava*: a god of death  
*bhājam*: a clay vessel used for roasting grain  
*bhajan*: the singing of devotional songs  
*bhajanchem*: a place for singing devotional songs  
*bhakta*: a devotee  
*bhārākūrā dāyegu*: the smashing of earthenware  
*Bhāro*: a Newar caste serving as ministers, courtiers and officials of the royal household in the past  
*Bhaṭṭāraka*: an honorific term used for gods  
*bhaupvā*: holes for cats  
*bhatti*: beverage shops  
*bhegaḥ*: an earthen pot  
*Bhikṣu*: a celibate monk  
*Bhiksusaṅgha*: a community of monks  
*bhiṃ*: good  
*Bhimsen*: the Newar god of trade and second brother of Pāṇḍava in epic Mahābhārata  
*bhināmasta*: children of daughters and sisters  
*bhūmi*: land  
*bhu dyo*: the ghost god  
*bhusvām*: a kind of flower  
*bhut*: ghosts or goblins  
*bhūtu*: a wood stove  
*Bhāṣāvaṃśāvalī*: a nineteenth century chronicle of Nepal  
*bhog chāyegu*: offering of food  
*bhvagatyā*: citrus fruit  
*bhvay*: meals served during festivals or any such festive occasions such as marriage  
*bhvay cale jupim*: those who share only feast food  
*bhvaysataḥ*: a place for feasting  
*bicāhō hāyekegu*: condolences  
*Bicāhō pūjā*: worship in the temple a few days after the completion of the deity's procession  
*bijyāye*: to come, to go or to move, an honorific term used for gods, monks, priests, kings and royalty  
*Bisket Jātrā*: a major annual festival of Bhaktapur  
*bubah*: boiled beans  
*Buddhimātā*: a name of the goddess Vajrayoginī of Sankhu  
*busārām*, (*busādam*): anniversaries  
*bvanegu* (Skt.: *nimantraṇa*): invitation  
*bvatā*: a bowl made of leaves  
*Byāghrinī* (Byāṃgini): the Tiger-faced guardian goddess  
*byaṃkegu*: a ritual purification  
*cahār*: the fourth grade of land  
*caitya*: a small Buddhist shrine  
*Caitya Bharāḍa*: another name of Jogeśvar Cibhā and his processional statue  
*cakati*: a small mat made of cloth  
*cakhaḥ*: minor festivals  
*cāku*: granulated sugar  
*Caṇḍīpāth*: a Sanskrit text containing hymns of praise for the goddess Durgā  
*Candrāvatī*: a sinful lady turned queen of Lāvanyadesa described in the legend of Svasthānī  
*cā pūjā*: nightly worship  
*caryā*: devotional songs  
*Cathā*: a minor Newar festival celebrated in September  
*Caturthiyāyegu*: a ritual of apology



- caurāsi byañjan*: the food containing eighty-four ingredients  
*chāyegu*: to offer  
*chembhāri*: housing officer  
*chemdi*: ground floor  
*Chipā* (Ranjitkār): the dyers  
*Chomkvāh*: bamboo soot  
*choylā*: boiled or burned meat  
*choylābhū*: a festive meal  
*chusyā*: a pair of small cymbals  
*chvāsah*: the crossroads  
*chvāsaaJimā*: the “grandmother” of the crossroads  
*Cibhā dyo*: Buddhist stupa  
*cibhvay*: the last feast meal with salt consumed by the participants of the festival of Mādhav Nārāyaṇa a day before the festival  
*cipa*: pollution caused by eating  
*cipam thiyē*: to eat something  
*cilākha*: a traditional torch  
*Citrakār* or *Puṃ*: the painters  
*Cobhār*: name of a gorge from where water of the Kathmandu Valley is drained  
*cuḍākaraṇa*: (Skt.): the shaving ceremony  
*cuka*: a courtyard surrounded by buildings  
*cumlā*: minced meat  
*Cvabāhāhō*: a monastery situated on the hill of Cobhār  
*cvataṃ*: living room  
  
*daci apā*: traditional bricks produced in the Kathmandu Valley  
*dabū*: a platform  
*daitya*: a demon  
*dakami*: a bricklayer  
*dākini*: a minor Mahāyāna goddess  
*dakṣiṇā*: fees  
*dakṣiṇāyaṇa* (Skt.): the summer solstice  
*dām*: money  
  
*dāmchi*: quarter penny coins  
*dāna*: a gift  
*Danyā*: funeral priests  
*dāphā*: a kind of music that uses one pair of two-sided large drums (*khiṃ*), a pair of cupped cymbals (*tiṃchu*) and traditional devotional songs sung by a group of people  
*dāphvaḥsvām*: a kind of scentless white jasmine but in the ritual replaceable by a silver imitation  
*dārśana*: to pay respect  
*daśadikpāla*: the lords of the ten directions  
*Dasain*: a Parvate name for the annual Hindu festival of the goddess Durgā  
*daśakarmma kriyā*: tenfold rites performed for human beings or deities  
*Dathumalā*: the name of a place near the temple of Vajrayoginī  
*dāykalā*: boiled meat with soup  
*degah*: a temple  
*dekhā* (Skt. *dikṣā*): a ritual initiation  
*desa*: country, referring also to small settlements  
*devaṃ*: a shroud  
*Devanāgarī*: the name of a script used to write and print by many modern languages of Nepal and India  
*Devī*: a female deity, a form of the goddess Durgā  
*dhā*: a kind of drums  
*dhāi lhai*: people’s remarks  
*dhākacā*: a bamboo basket decorated with colourful cloths  
*dhaki*: a wicker tray  
*dhalam danegu*: to participate in a religious fast  
*dhacā*: a small water channel  
*dhāraṇī mantra*: a class of Mahāyānic literature composed between the 4th and 8th century.

AD, which refers to *mantra*,  
*maṇḍala*, *kriyā*, *caryā*, etc  
*dharma*: religion, sense of  
discipline, right action  
Dharmapvācā: the 'hole of virtues'  
at a cave monastery of  
Vajrayoginī  
*dhaubaji*: yogurt served together  
with beaten rice  
*dhime (dhimay)*: a kind of drum  
*dholak*: a two-headed drum  
*dhoti*: a lower garment  
*dhuku*: a store room in the house  
Dhum bijyā: the completion of the  
festive celebration during the  
festival of Vajrayoginī  
*dhvākā*: a gate  
*dhvākāmpine*: the outskirts of the  
town  
*dhyan*: recitation of hymns  
*digu dyo*: lineage deities  
*dipa (masāna)*: the cremation  
ground  
*ḍṣṭi kamkegu*: ritual opening of the  
eyes of the deities  
*dokā*: crossroads  
*dokābhutcā*: spirits and ghosts of the  
crossroads  
Dom: a low Newar caste, the dholak  
players  
*doyam*: the second grade of land  
Duiṃ (Putuvār): *the palanquin*  
*carriers and trumpeters*  
*duṃ danegu*: to prostrate oneself  
*duṃgā*: a boat  
Duiṃcā nyāyekigu: making the  
walk of a Duiṃ  
*dvairājya*: *dual kingdoms*  
*dvāre*: a village or town head or  
chief in charge of local  
administrative work and  
revenue collections before the  
end of Rana regime in 1951  
*dyo (dyah)*: gods  
*dyo bvaiegu*: displaying the gods  
*dyo chem*: a god house

*dyo jvanimha*: the statue carrier  
Dyolā: the cleaners or temple  
guardians  
*dyo lhāyegu*: a kind of music or  
melody for paying respect to  
gods and goddesses  
*dyo sataḥ*: a god's resthouse  
*eghāraghāsā*: the food with eleven  
ingredients offered in the name  
of death  
Ekjāṭi: a name of the goddess  
Vajrayoginī  
Gāgal: a name of a place around  
Sankhu  
*gāhiti*: a stone tap  
*gā*: a shawl  
*gam*: bells  
*gamalā*: an earthen pot containing  
soil for growing flowering  
plants  
Gaṇeśa: a Hindu god, a son of the  
Lord Śiva and the goddess  
Parvatī  
*garbhādhāna* (Skt.): the  
impregnation-rite  
Gathāmmugaḥ: the ghost god  
Gathāmmugaḥcarhe: the fourteenth  
day of Guṃlā month. The day  
of the festival to expel ghost  
gods  
Gathu: the gardeners  
*ghaṃghalā*: anklet with a string of  
small bells  
Gāuṃ Vikās Samiti: a Village  
Development Committee  
*ghaḥsu*: the house purification rite  
performed on eleventh day after  
a death  
*ghāt*: river banks for bathing  
Gitagovinda: devotional songs  
related to the Lord Kṛṣṇa  
Gopālarājavamśāvalī: the 14th  
century chronicle of Nepal

- Gorkhā: a district situated in the west of Nepal, the former kingdom of the ancestors of present royal dynasty of Nepal
- Gorkhālī: inhabitants of Gorkhā, name of the language spoken by these people now, which is known as Nepali as the only official language of Nepal
- gotra*: clan
- grāma*: the village
- Gudekhvā: name of a place around Sankhu
- Gulimā: name of a place around Sankhu
- gum*: forest
- Gumbāhāhō: the forest monastery where the temple of Vajrayoginī is situated
- gumgū*: a kind of incense
- Gumlā: the tenth month of the year in the Nepal Era, which is a sacred month for Buddhists
- Gumphuni: the name of a full-moon day and a festival day
- guruju*: a Buddhist Vajrācārya priest
- guthi* (Skt.: *goṣṭhī*): socio-religious associations of the Newars
- Guthi Bandovasta Addā: the Guthi Administrative Office
- Guthi Samsthān: the Guthi Corporation
- guthiyār*: the *guthi* members
- gvahjā*: rice pastries made for rituals
- gvasim*: wood
- gvay*: betel nuts
- gvay dām tayegu*: an offering of betel nuts and coins to a deity, king or a patron of rituals as a gesture of invitation
- gvaysvām*: a nut-shaped flower
- Hālāhulu: the lowest caste in Newar society
- halampau*: frills
- Hijākhū: the name of a river in the Valley
- hikvā*: boiled blood
- hiti*: water spouts, taps
- homa*: a fire sacrifice
- homagāh*: a fire pit
- homva*: an instrument used to perform the oblation into the fire
- hundi*: a regular allowance of some food and money provided to hermits and saints
- Hyāumkhvāh mājū: the Red-faced mother, the fixed statue of the goddess Vajrayoginī
- hyaumkokhā*: a piece of red cloth used as a garland
- hyāumthvam*: red beer
- ikā*: yellow mustard seeds
- imū*: a kind of medicinal herb (*Ligusticum ajowan*)
- Indra: the king of the gods and goddesses
- Indra jātrā: the festival of Indra
- Ihi*: a ritual marriage ceremony observed by Newar female children
- Ipātvāh: one of the eight quarters of Sankhu
- itā*: wicks
- jivadāna*: the giving of life
- jā cale jupim*: those with whom one may share boiled rice
- jāgir*: crown land or reward for government functionaries
- jajaṃkā*: a garland of threads
- jala*: holy water
- jāmā*: a long skirt
- jaṃko*: the ceremony in which a child begins eating grains, an old ceremony which is observed when one turns 77 years 7 months and 7 days old

*janai* (Skt.: *raṅṣā vandhan*): a sacred thread that Brahmins tie around their neck and also worn around people's arms

*japa*: meditation

*jāt*: caste

*jātakarmm*: the birth ceremony

*jātrā* (*yātrā*): processions of gods and goddesses or pilgrimages

*jābhvay*: a boiled rice feast

*jhārāphuki vaidya*: the healers who treat patients by blowing air with secret mantras

*jilājām*: husbands of sisters and daughters

Jillā Vikās Samiti: District Development Committee

Jogi: the musicians or tailors

*Jogibvaḥ*: a portion of food to appease deceased ancestors but handed over to the Jogī, during different festivals and the *śrāddha* of ancestors

Joṣī: the caste of astrologers

*juju* (*mahārāj*): the king

*jujuyā taruvā*: a royal sword representing the reigning king

Jyāpu: the caste of farmers

Jyāpu Mahāguthi: the Great Foundation of the Farmers

Jyeṣṭha (Jeṭṭha): the second month of the Vikram era

*jiyupim*: a dominant block, a well-off community

*kacikā*: raw cotton thread

*kacilā*: raw meat

*kāhā*: trumpet

*kaḥsi*: an open rooftop

*kala* (*kalah*): a basket or metal vessel with a handle used for carrying materials for worshipping

*kalaśa*: a holy jar

Kaligata Saṃvat: a name of an era

Kaliyuga: the age of destructions

*kanāth*: cornet

Karmācārya: a Hindu Newar priest  
Kārtik (Kāttika): the month of

Kārtik

Kārtikādi eras: the lunar eras that are changed in the month of

Kārtik

*kasturī*: the musk

Kau: the blacksmith caste

*kaulā*: breakfast

*kavaḥ*: family branches

*kavaṃ*: a skeleton

*kaytā pūjā*: a ritual initiation performed for young boys when they are handed over loincloths

*khacarā*: the person of mixed descent

*khaḍga*: a sword

*khāisi*: a bitter orange

*khākegu*: to shiver

*khalah*: a group

*khāmecā*: a young buffalo

*khānki*: a salary

*khaypicaypi*: pieces of raw pumpkin in different shapes

*kheluitā*: long wicks used during the festival of Svanti

Khicā pūjā: the worship of dogs

*khim*: two-sided large drums

*khu* (*khusi*): river

*khucupā*: turn of six branches

*khuku*: the sixth eldest

*khumdyo*: the stealing god

*khvāḥ*: a face

*khvāḥ*: a furry creature

Kijā pūjā: the worship of brothers by their sisters

*kikimpā*: leaves made of gold or silver to decorate the crowns of deities

Kirāta (Kirāti): a ruling dynasty of Nepal who ruled Nepal before the Licchavis and their descendants

*kisali* (*kisli*): a shallow earthen pot with rice grains, a betel nut and a coin

- ko*: below  
*kotaḥ*: a large plate for worship  
*koṭyāhuti mahayañña*: the great fire sacrifice of ten millions  
*Kṛṣṇa* or *Krishna*: the ninth incarnation of the Lord Viṣṇu  
*Kṛṣṇapakṣa*: the dark half of a month  
*Kṣayamāsa*: the loss of a month in the lunar calendar  
*kṣemā pūjā*: the ‘worship of apology’  
*Kṣetrapāla*: the guardian of a locality  
*Kṣetrī*: a Parvate caste ranked below the Brahmins in hierarchy  
*kula*: clan  
*kuṇḍa*: pond  
*kuṇḍala*: a kind of ornament  
*Kumārī*: the virgin goddess, a virgin girl representing the virgin  
*kunām* (*kulanāma*) or *benām*: clan name or nickname  
*kut*: a specific sharecropping under which the landowner or the state appropriates a specific quantity of the produce or a stated sum in cash as rent  
*kūtāḥ*: a bier  
*kuthi*: storage rooms for grain  
*Kuti*: a place in Tibet  
*kuti*: a foot-operated pounder for husking rice  
*kvahām bijyā*: bringing down  
*kvālā*: a light snack  
*Kva pūjā*: the worship of crows  
*kvāti*: a soup made of nine kinds of grain  
*kyaba*: a garden  
  
*lagat*: a record  
*laḥ cale jupim*: those with whom one may share drinking water and cooked rice  
*laḥgha*: water-driven grinding mills  
*laḥ tvamkegu*: to give water to drink  
  
*laimkvāḥ*: radish curry  
*lākhe*: a demon  
*Lakṣmīnārāyaṇa*: the goddess Lakṣmī and the Lord Viṣṇu  
*Lakṣmī pūjā*: the worship of the goddess Lakṣmī (and cow)  
*lālmohar*: a government stamp  
*lāni* (*mahārānī*): the queen  
*lasatā*: joy, entertainment  
*Lāvanya desa*: a mythical country in legend of Svasthānī  
*lāyku*: the palace  
*Lichhavi*: a dynasty, who ruled Nepal from 3<sup>rd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> century  
*liṅga*: an image of god Śiva represented by his phallus  
*lusi*: pestles  
*lusi thikeyu*: a symbolical nail-cutting by a barber for ritual purification  
*lvahacāmari*: a small steamed rice pastry  
*lvāhaṃ hīti*: stone spouts  
  
*mabhim*: bad  
*macābu byamke*: purification of a child at birth  
*Mādhav Nārāyaṇa*: a form of Viṣṇu, especially worshipped in the month of Māgha  
*Mahābrāhmaṇa*: funeral priests  
*Mahādev*: great god or god of the gods, another name of Śiva  
*Mahākāla*: Śiva in his fierce form, the god of death  
*Mahām*: traditional army guard  
*majyupim*: subordinate bloc  
*makaḥ*: a fire pot  
*malā*: an open latrine  
*mālapu kerā*: a kind of banana  
*mālaśrī*: a kind of tune which is sung at the Daśain festival in the praise of Kālī  
*Mallakhacarā*: a Malla person of mixed descent

Māmyākhvāḥ svayegu: the festival of honouring one's mother

*Mandala, mandah (maṇḍala)*: a cosmic circle

Maṇisāila Mahāvadāna: the legend containing stories of the origin of Sankhu and the Buddha as Maṇicūḍa

*mantra*: incantation, spell

*maricari*: sweetmeats

Marikaḥmi (Haluvāi): traditional bakers or sweet makers in Nepal

*masalā pva*: a packet with walnuts, chestnuts, betel nuts, pistachio nuts, cashew nuts, almonds, raisins, cinnamon, chocolates and cloves

*mataḥ*: lights

*mātaṃ*: first floor

*matawali*: alcohol-consuming category

*mathyā*: illegitimate

*mātrkā*: one among eight mother goddesses

*matu*: a crown

*māy*: black lentils

*me*: song

*mhamataḥ*: body light

Mha pūjā: the worship of the self

Mhāsukhvāḥ māju: the Yellow-faced mother, the processional statue of the goddess Vajrayoginī

*mhāymasta*: daughters

*mhitakegu*: to make play

*miḡāḥ*: the fire-pit

*mikvāḥ*: boiled fenugreek seeds

*mipvāḥ*: fire

Mohanī: black soot, the Newar name to the Hindu festival of goddess Durgā (Nep.: *Dasain*)

*mṛttikā* (Skt.): earth

*mūbhvay*: the main feast

Mū bijyā: main day of festive celebration, the fifth day of the Vajrayoginī festival

*mudrā*: posture, gesture

*Mū jātrā*: the main day of procession

*mūlācārya*: the chief priest

*mūla siddha pūjā*: major worship

*mūlukhā*: main gate

Muluki Ain: legal code of the country

*murdā*: death

*murī*: a unit of volume equivalent to 48.77 kg of paddy: one *murī* consists of 20 *pāthi*

*mūrti*: a statue or an image of a god or goddess

*mvāhāli*: a short curved horn played by the Jogi caste

*nādi vaidya*: one who treat patients by examining their pulse

*nāga*: divine serpents

Nāgācā: name of a place near Sankhu

Nagarpālikā: a municipality

*nāga pāy*: a divine serpent made of paper

Nāju: the caste of the horn blowers

*nake*: to feed

*nakhaḥ*: major festivals

*nakhaḥ cakhaḥ*: major and minor festivals

*nakhatyā*: a feast in conjunction of a festival

*nakim*: the eldest woman

*nalāsvām*: the holy sprouts grown in secret house shrines during the festival of Dasain

*nalāsvane*: to sow barley and maize seeds in secret house shrines to grow sprouts

*nāmakarṇa* (Skt.): the name-giving ceremony

*nani*: a common courtyard

Narasimha: an incarnation of Lord Viṣṇu in his half-man and half-lion form

Nārāyaṇa: a name of the god Viṣṇu

- Nāsaḥ dyo: the god of dance and drama  
*Nāsaḥ kāpaḥ*: a painted cloth with a sign of Nāsaḥdayo  
 Nau: the barbers  
 Navarāja: the name of the king in the legend of Svasthānī  
*navarātri*: the nine nights dedicated to the goddess Durgā  
 Nāy: the butchers  
*nāykhim*: butcher's music  
*nāykhim cvayekegu*: a traditional method of public announcements, which are carried out with butcher's music  
 Nayām Mulukī Ein: the New Legal Code of Nepal introduced in 1964  
 Nepal Bhasa (Nepāl bhāṣā), Newar or Newārī: a language of Nepal spoken by the Newars  
 Nepal Samvat: the Nepal era, introduced on 20 October 879 AD  
 Nepālī (Nepālī): Khas-Nepali or Parvatiyā, the official language of Nepal; people of Nepal  
 Nevāḥ (Nevāl, Nevār or Newar): Newar speakers  
 Nevāḥ De Dabū: the National Forum of the Newars  
*nhaynhumā*: cooked food offered to deceased people by their relatives on the seventh day after death  
*nīlaḥ*: clean water used in rituals  
*nhavaṃ*: a ritual bathing of a deity  
*nhayku*: the seventh eldest  
*nīpa*: unpolluted  
*nīsī*: a purification  
*niṣkramaṇa*: the ceremonial showing of the sun for the first time to a newly born child  
*nislā*: food offerings made to a Brahmin in the name of deceased ancestors  
*nitya pūjā*: daily worship  
*nvaku*: the second eldest or deputy head  
*nyāku*: the fifth eldest  
*nyāmha kanyā nakim*: five oldest virgins  
*nyāsa*: life  
*nyāsa luyegu*: the pouring of life  
*nyāsa pikāyegu*: the removing of life  
*nyātām*: fifth floor  
*pāḥ*: a turn  
*paḥkā*: reddish brown mustard seed  
*paisā*: coins  
*pāko* or *pāku*: a cave  
*pālācā*: a shallow earthen bowl  
*pāhlā (pālā)*: the person whose turn it is  
*palisthā* (Skt.: *pratisthā*): installation  
*paṃcasnāna*: a symbolical bath taken to purify ritually  
 Pāmgā: a Newar village situated south of Kirtipur  
*pañcabali*: a ceremony of sacrificing five different animals (a buffalo, goat, ram, duck and cock) to a certain deity sponsored by individuals or state  
*pañcāmṛta*: five sacred liquids  
*pañcāṅga (pātro)*: almanac, traditional calendar  
*pañcopacāra pūjā*: a service of worship in five steps  
*pañcapallava*: five varieties of leaves  
 Panauti: a Newar town situated east of the Kathmandu Valley  
 Pañca Buddha: the five Buddhas  
*pañcākṣara*: five holy Buddhist letters  
 Panchayat (Paṃcāyat): the partyless political system, which functioned; from the national to

- the village level in Nepal (1960 to 1990)
- Parvate: the people from the mountains. They are also called “Khasa.” Their language is also known by the same name which later began to be called Gorkhālī, then Nepali
- pasukā*: five-coloured threads
- patāḥ*: flag
- pātāla*: the netherworld
- Paṭanā: the capital city of Bihar
- pāthī*: a traditional measurement, a unit of volume equivalent to 2.43 kg of paddy. A *pāthi* is divided into eight *mānā* and a *mānā* into eight *muṭhī* in the traditional measurement
- pātī*: a rest place, shelter
- pāuṃ kvāḥ*: a sour soup
- pitṛ*: (Skt.): deceased ancestors
- pātra*: a bowl
- pātro*: a traditional calendar
- pāyāḥ*: the sword procession
- phakaṃ*: arum lily (*caladium arumacia*) leaves
- phakaṃsanā*: a kind of pickle made of *caladium arumacia*
- phalaprasāna* (Skt.): the ceremony when a child begins eating fruits
- phalcā*: a rest place, shelter or shade
- phāṃgā*: a cover
- pidanigu*: a performance
- pīṭha*: a shrine of eight mother goddesses
- Pohelā: the third month of the Nepal Era, which falls in January/February
- poṭā*: tax
- potāy*: rice flour used in rituals
- Prajāpati: the potters
- prasād* (Skt.): blessings
- Pratinidhi Sabhā: the House of Representatives
- preta*: spirits
- pūjā*: worship or ritual
- Pūjābhāri: one whose responsibility it is to organise royal or government worship
- pūjābhu* (*pūjābhaḥ*): plates for worship
- pūjākuthi*: a place of worship
- Puṃ: a painter
- Punhi (Pūrṇimā): a full-moon day
- phuki*: clan and kin group
- pūrāṇa*: sacred scripture
- Pūrṇmāntaka: the month ending on a full-moon day
- pvaka*: fermented rice
- pukālā*: fried meat
- puraśācarana* (*puraścaraṇa*): a purification ritual
- pyākhaṃ*: dance and drama
- pyaku*: the fourth eldest
- pyataṃ*: fourth floor
- rāhu*: a demon
- rāj* (*rājakiya*): royal
- rājkuḷo*: the king’s water channel
- Rana: family name of those who established the hereditary Prime Ministership in Nepal for 104 years (1846-1951)
- ranga kotanegu*: painting
- Rāṣṭriya Sabhā: the National Assembly
- ropanī*: a unit of land comprising an area of 5,476 square feet or 0.05 hectare. A *ropanī* is divided into sixteen *ānā*, while an *ānā* is divided into four *paisā* and a *paisā* is divided into four *dām*
- Rupinī: a minor Mahāyāna goddess
- Sābā: the guardians of Mādhav
- Nārāyaṇa
- sādhu*: hermit
- saga*: a solid-waste disposal site
- sagaṃ*: foods for blessing
- sāhasradhārā*: a thousand spouts
- sāhumahājana*: the traders
- sāita*: an auspicious time or date set for a ritual



- sājavā*: a cowherd  
 Śaka Saṃvat: the Śaka era  
*sākhati*: syrup of granulated brown sugar  
*saki*: roots of the arum lily (*caladium arumacia*)  
 Sakimilā punhi: full-moon day for boiling roots of the arum lily (*caladium arumacia*)  
 Śākyamunī: the Buddha  
 Sakva, Sākva, Sakvade or Sāmkhu: the town of Sankhu  
 Śākya (Sakya): Newar Buddhist household monks and goldsmiths  
 Sālinakhu (Salinadī): the Sālinadī river  
 Sālkhādhvākā: the gate of Sālkhā quarter  
*salim*: a shallow earthen pot  
*samājvalam*: make-up kit  
*samaybaji*: a festive food containing beaten rice, black soybeans, ginger, burned meat and liquor  
 Samde: the Newar word for Tibet  
 Sāmgādhvākā: one of the four main gates of Sankhu  
 Saṃkrānti: the first day of a month in the Vikram calendar  
*śaṃkha*: a conch  
 Saṃkharāpur (Saṅkarāpur): another name for Sankhu  
 Saṃvat (Samvat): an era  
*sanā*: the funeral procession  
*sanā Guthi*: a caste-bound funeral association in Newar society  
 Śaṅkaradeva (Saṅkhadev): the legendary first king of Sankhu  
*sānti*: peace  
 Sāpāru: the cow's first day of the dark half of Guṃlā month  
 Śaṣṭhī: the sixth day of either half of a lunar month  
*śāstrārtha*: a religious debate  
*sataḥ*: a resthouse or shelter  
 Satyayuga: the golden age, the mythical time when human beings and gods and goddesses were able to communicate with each other  
*sāyāḥ*: the procession of the cow  
 Sāymi (Mānandhar): the oil pressers  
 Shah: the ruling dynasty of present-day Nepal  
 Śreṣṭha, Shrestha (*syasaḥ*): the trader or administrator caste in Newar society  
*sī*: the parts of the head of the sacrificial animal  
*sībājā*: funeral music  
 Sigatse: a place in Tibet  
*sī Guthi*: a caste-bound funeral association in Newar society  
*sīkāḥbhvay*: a feast in which the parts of the head of a sacrificed animal is divided among the eldest members of a family or a socio-religious association  
*sim*: the third grade of land  
*simānā*: the borderline  
*siṃgam*: a wooden bell  
 Siṃhiṇī: the Lion-faced guardian goddess  
*siṃtā*: pieces of pine wood  
*sinājyā*: transplanting rice  
*sinhaṃ* (Nep.: *ṭikā*): coloured powders used as marks of blessing on the forehead of a person  
*sinhaṃmhu*: a vermilion container  
*sisāphusā*: fruit  
*siyegu*: gilding  
*snāna* (Skt.): bathing  
*ṣoḍaśopacāra-pūjā*: a service of worship in sixteen steps  
 Sorha *śrāddha*: the sixteen days dedicated to *śrāddha* rituals for the deceased  
*Sri 5 ko Sarkār*: His Majesty's Government (HMG)  
*śrikhaṇḍa*: sandalwood

*Sristitogatābdah* (Skt.): the era from the time of creation  
*stupa*: a Buddhist caitya  
*śudra*: the lowest ranked caste according to the four-*varṇa* category of Hindu society  
*sukhāvātī bhuvana*: the heavenly abode imagined by religious Buddhists  
*Śuklapakṣa*: the bright half of moon  
*sukulā*: dried meat  
*sukundā*: an oil lamp with an image of Gaṇeśa  
*sulīm*: liquor house  
*sunyakā*: a day of inactivity  
*svām*: a flower  
*syābaji*: a kind of popped rice  
*syākvatyākva*: ‘the more you sacrifice, the more you gain’  
*svaku*: the third eldest  
*Svasthānī*: a legendary story, which is recited every year for a month in Nepal in January/February  
*Svayambhū*: a famous Buddhist caitya in Nepal (the self emanated god)  
*tā*: cymbals  
*tabalā*: a pair of one headed drums  
*tāre mām*: ‘save us mother’  
*tahāsā*: a bamboo structure decorated with colourful cloths which is carried out in a procession by the relatives of the recently deceased people on the day of the cow’s procession  
*taḥsi*: wild lime, common citron  
*Taleju*: the tutelary goddess of the Malla kings of Nepal  
*Tamang* (Tāmāṅg): a Tibeto-Burman nationality in Nepal  
*tamsuka*: land documents  
*Tāmtāmghisiṃ*: processions of stick fighters  
*tāntrik vaidya*: ones who treat their patients using *tāntrik* methods

*tārā*: the common name given to a large number of Buddhist goddesses  
*tāraṃ taye*: magic spells  
*tās*: shiny cloths  
*tāy*: popped rice  
*Thahām bijyā*: bringing the processional statues up from the town to their forest temple  
*thakālī*: the eldest  
*Thakuri*: a royal dynasty of Nepal who ruled Nepal before the Mallas (9 to 12th century)  
*thar*: levels, clans  
*thāpim*: items for worship, mostly a pot containing liquor  
*thā pūjā*: a secret form of worship performed at the temple of Vajrayoginī  
*thāybhu*: a plate used for ritual offering of food  
*thekedār*: a contractor  
*Theravād*: a Buddhist doctrine  
*Tihār*: the festival of light  
*tikjhyāḥ*: lattice window  
*tiṃchu*: a pair of cupped cymbals  
*tīrtha*: confluence, place of pilgrimage  
*Tistung*: a Newar settlement outside the Valley to the south  
*tithi*: lunar days  
*tisā*: ornaments  
*Tisābicāhō guthi*: associations for looking after the ornaments  
*toraṇa*: a tympanum  
*trikhuṭṭi*: a three-legged iron stand  
*triratna*: three jewels in Buddhism, namely Buddha, Religion (*dharma*) and Community (*saṃgha*)  
*tulasī*: the sacred plant *Ocimum basilicum*  
*tulegu*: to roll  
*tuṃthi*: a well  
*tuphi*: a broom  
*tvādevā*: lighting stand

*tvāḥ (ṭol)*: a quarter

*uḡaḥ*: wooden mortar

Ugratārā: a fearsome form of the goddess *tārā*

Upādhyāy: assistant priest

*uphosvām*: a blue lotus flower

*uttarāyaṇa*: the winter solstice

*va*: bread made from lentils

*vācaka*: a reciter

*vaidya*: a healer

*vaiśya*: the third category in Hindu caste hierarchy (*varṇa*)

*vajra*: thunderbolt

Vajrayoginī: the goddess

Vajrayoginī of Sankhu

Vajrācārya: a Buddhist priest

*vāḱijāḱi*: half-husked rice

Vāṃdā dyo: the rain beaten goddess

*vaṃśāvalī*: chronicles

*varṇa*: caste category

*varṇāśram*: the caste system in Hinduism, which divides society into four hierarchical orders

*vāpijyā pyākhaṃ*: mock rice transplantation in dance and drama

*vasibaṃ puigu*: the morning cleaning

*vāstu vidyā*: the knowledge of architecture

Vāsuki Nāga: a name of the divine serpent

Vasundharā (Vasudharā): earth mother

*vāuṃcā*: vegetables

Vikramāditya: a legendary king

Vereniging (Dutch): an association

Viṣṇu: one among the three most important Hindu gods

*vivāha*: marriage

*vrata*: a religious fast

*vratālu*: the participants in a *vrata*

yaciṃ kāye: the collection of holy water

yakṣa: a demon

*yajamān*: the chief patron

*yajña* (Skt.): a fire sacrifice

Yaṃlā: the eleventh month of the Nepāl era

*yamyā*: the festival of Yaṃlā

*yaḥsim*: ceremonial poles

*yomari*: a steamed rice pastry filled with molasses and sesame seed

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